MEMORIAM

ANNAPURNA MAHARANA

Invited Contributors

Narayan Desai
Jitendra Nath Mohanty
Nilakantha Rath
Shailaj Rabi
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MEMORIAM:ANNAPURNA MAHARANA

Published by
Jnanadeva Maharana
Karmadeva Maharana

Printed at
Bhumika Printers
Plot # 299, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar – 751 012
Mob: 90406 30310

Date of publication
31st December, 2013



দুঃস্বপ্নে আতঙ্কে রক্ষা করিলে অঙ্কে
স্নেহময়ী তুমি মাতা।



[With Gandhiji]

FOREWORD

It is a bizarre idea to unveil a memorial volume by two sons for their mother, although it is not so uncommon in this part of this world. However, this effort deserves an apology. Annapurna, born in 1917 was initiated in topublic life at the tender age of thirteen. She was an activist in saltSatyagraha in 1930 and was briefly behind the bars for illegally hawkingthe '*salt*' on the street. She was a participant in the Harijan Padayatra ofGandhiji in 1934. Later she went to Bari, a highly flood- prone backwardregion in Odisha with her parents and settled there. Setting aGandhian Ashram there, the whole family dedicated their life to nationalstruggle, constructive works and social reforms. She was very deeply intoGandhian way of life and she practiced religiously all the programmesGandhiji introduced between 1934 and 1942. Notable among them were denouncinguntouchability as a social evil and working among the untouchables, spreading Khadi movement in thesurrounding villages andbringing village women folk into the mainstreamof Swaraj movement. She was the first woman activist from Odisha who wentto Wardha to get training in basic education. After her marriage to SaratChandra Maharana, she settled down briefly at Ramachandrapur (now in Jajpurdistrict of Odisha) where a institution for Basic Education wasset up.However, shortly thereafterGandhiji launched the Quit India Movement. Thecouple was arrested and was sent to jail without any trial .They werelodged in two separate jails as security prisoners. After they werereleased, they again settled down in Ramachandrapur.

A new phase in their life began when the first child arrived in 1945. Both Annapurna and Sarat Chandra practiced Gandhian way of life following the advice of mahatma in order to build India of his dream. Gandhiji was assassinated in 1948. This catastrophic and tragic event was atraumatic experience for the devout Gandhians and it did emotionally affectthe couplebut soon they were back on their feet more determined to carryon. Later that year Sarat Chandra had nervous breakdown andthanks to the extraordinary care Annapurna took, he felt reassured and soonrecovered. The second son was born in 1951. As is well known, Vinobajistarted his *Bhoodan Movement* that year. Those Gandhians who had notaccepted political office and had resisted the temptations of power inpost-independence India saw a glimmer of hope in Vinobaji's movement forfulfilling the Gandhian dream of *Gram Swaraj*. All the notable Gandhians whobelieved in decentralisation of power and in village based economy jumpedheadlong into the movement. Sarat Chandra left Ramachandrapur and devotedall his energy to Bhoodan Movement leaving behind Annapurna to raise thetwo kids and to fend for herself. She had to maintain the family of threefor Sarat Chandra had no adequate financial means to support the family.Thus there is a kind of blackout gap in Annapurna's life from(approximately) 1952 to 1964 since (at least) we have not come across anyprecise and detailed account of this period in her life. What is known tous and many others is that she undertook translation work to eke out aliving. Some of those works have been hailed by critics astranscreationper excellence. In our judgment, this was a very crucial period in herlife. It led her to build a foundation on which the next phase of her lifecould securely rest.

The next phase of Annapurna Maharana, from 1964 to her last breath iscommon knowledge. After her death, in memorial meetings as well as inobituaries in the media and souvenirs her

departed soul was showered withtributes often in superlatives. But with few exceptions, they hardly threwany light on her convictions or fundamental principles she had adhered to.

Out of many of her admirers who knew her from close quarters and wereemotionally involved in her life and activities we have invited only sixto write for this volume. We hope the contributors have done justice tothe discussion of the facet of her life each of them has covered. They havetaken sufficient care to give depth to the discussion and draw out thesubtle nuances of her personality.

Of course, we are aware of the shortcoming of the present format. It givesan impression ofonly limited aspects of Annapurna's vast activities beingdealt with. On the other hand in the usual format of a 'souvenir' there maybe wider coverage of her life and activities. But there is the inherentdanger of dilution and repetition. We bothbeing practicing physicists, pondered over these two pitfalls and as is our wont in science,preferred focusing on fundamental principles and economy of ideas. We feel,this paradigm is applicable to human life as well. Every one leads a lifedriven by certain fundamental principles and cherished goals. In thisperspective, it is not irrelevant to ask questions, such aswhat were thefundamental principles in the life ofAnnapurna Maharana and what were hermost cherished goals? Once this is answered, we feel, the clue to her styleof functioning and to what followed in her actions becomes automaticallyclear. We have concluded that she uncompromisingly adhered to the singleprinciple of nonviolence. She never wavered from that.

We requested Prof. Jitendra Nath Mohanty to write an article on thephilosophy of Non-violence. We think, this internationally knownphilosopher, who was very muchfamiliar with Gandhiji's as well asAnnapurna's ideas was the fittest personto write on this topic. Thedepth of the article is testimony to our assertion. Annapurna firmlyadhered to the Gandhian path while fighting for theindependence of India.We requested Narayan Desai, one of her co-fighters to contribute on thataspect of her life. Both had tremendous affection and respect for eachother besides their emotional and family bonds. We could not think of abetter person than Narayan Desai to pay tribute to her through thisarticle. Asalluded to earlier she was a pioneer basic-education educatorin Odisha. Annapurna in that role has been discussed by Anadi Charan Naikand Jyoti Bhai Desai .Whereas Anadi Bhai focuses on activities of the VaniShree and gives a critical assessment of the reasons for failure of thesystem, Jyoti Bhai; with his lifelong involvement in the basic educationprocess has presented his perspectives sincerely. Annapurna Maharana hascontributed substantially to Oriya literature. As an acknowledgement ofthat she has been awarded Sarala Puraskar, the most prestigious award inOdia literature. Shailaja Rabi, the well-known Odia poet and critic who hasworked with her for sometime and is well acquainted with her corpus hascontributed a critical review of her writings, especially, her magnum opus,her memoir. The renowned economist Nilakantha Rath (of Rath – Dandekar 'Poverty-line' fame) hascontributed an article. His contributions in the context of Indian economics are very well known. Moreover, he is a very close family friend of hers.

So not as her children but as two persons who had the rare privilege ofsharing a life with a great Gandhian warrior; sharing it with her throughsunshine as much as through rain and storm and

sharing it with her from herwomb to her tomb, literally, we thought it our duty to pay our homage toher by introducing her to the English speaking world. Compilation of thisbunch of well-wrought essays is a small offering aimed at that.

Acknowledgments:We express our deep gratitude for sparing their valuable time in composing these excellent articles. All the articles have been reproduced without any editing by us. The magnificent efforts of Sri Deepankar Dash to compile all contributions in a single format and giving finishing touches to the photographs are more gratefully acknowledged. The printers "Bhumika Printers" deserve our thanks for their technical skills.

Jnanadeva Maharana Karmadeva Maharana

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INDIA POSTAGE

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P.O. Bari
Cuttack dist.



[Bangladesh Refugee Camp, 1971]

सेवाग्राम SEVAGRAM,
वर्धा सी.पी. WARDHA, C.P.

سیواگرام
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चि. अन्नपूर्णा,

तू पागल है। विवाह करके तू बिलकुल गिरी नहीं है। तेरे स्वभाव को तू कैसे जीत सकती है? लेकिन तू अवश्य गिरेगी अगर तू भोगविलास में पड जायगी और तेरा कर्तव्य भूलेगी। विवाह संयम का साधन बन सकता है अगर हम उसे संयम का साधन बनावें तो। विवाह में [illegible] है ऐसा मानने की भूल करेगी। कहीं पीछे ऊंचे चढ़ने का प्रयत्न ही सिद्ध हो जायगा। इस लिये ऐसा मान के ही विवाह कर के तू आगे चढेगी।

बापुके
आशीर्वाद

[Letter from Mahatma Gandhi]

Annapurna Maharana

by

Narayan Desai

Narayan Desai

Shri Narayan Desai is one of the eminent living Gandhians.He grew up in Sevagram, Wardha, with Gandhiji as his guardian after his father, Shri Mahadev Desai, passed away in the Aga Khan Palace being a coprisnor with Gandhiji. He has dedicated his life to Sarvodaya and Bhoodan movements. He took part in Bhoodan and Gramdan programme from the inception of Vinobaji's call. Shri Desai pioneered the Santi Sena (Peace Brigrade) whose mandate is to resolve all conflicts by peaceful and nonviolent means. Shri Desai was a very close associate of Jaya Prakash Narayan and he was very deeply involved in the Sampoorna Kranti (total Revolution) of JP. He has authored several authored several books on Gandhian movement for indepence of India. In recent years, he has been spreading Gandhiji's message in India and abroad through his 'Gandhi Katha'. He was married to younger sister of Annapurna Maharana,Uttara, the daughter of Nabakrushna and Malati Choudhury.

ANNAPURNA MAHARANA

Narayan Desai

Annapoorna Maharana, affectionately called 'Chuni Apa' among close circles, was the characteristic daughter of the non-violent Freedom Movement in India. She not only inherited the three main attributes of the movement viz. Satyagraha, Constructive Work, and the eleven observances of Gandhian Ashrams, from her two illustrious parents, but also added her own contribution to it. Her father Gopabandhu Chaudhary, who renounced a prestigious government job to join the Civil Disobedience campaign, had such as ascetic life that he was often known as 'Orissa Gandhi'by his admirers. Annapoorna's mother Rama Devi was one of the pioneers of the social reforms in Orissa.

Brought up in an ascetic environment, Annapoorna added a radical lustre to it by her strong but always unassuming character; her sharp intelligence combined with a gentle sense of humour, and her rare blending of courage and self-restraint.

One can conclude certain facts without going into a detailed report guided by his faith in God and the people of India. But having an overall view at these three historic decades, a student of modern Indian History can easily see a definite strategy emerging out of it. It was a strategy that sustained the spirit if millions of Indian men and women through many ups and downs for almost thirty years and led them to their ultimate goal.

The most distinctly visible features of the grand strategy were the three nationwide movements known as the Non-Cooperation, the Civil Disobedience, and the so called 'Quit India Movement' following each another once in a decade. None of the three national movements succeeded to achieve its immediate goal. But each of them involved more number of people than the earlier one and claimed much more sacrifice from them. The overall tempo of the country also rose higher and higher in spite of the obvious failures. The nationwide non-cooperation movement attracted thousands of educated middle class professionals to the struggle particularly students and professors and other professionals. They voluntarily courted arrest and suffered imprisonment. The significant feature of the Civil Disobedience movement was the part played in it by the women of India. Thousands of them came out of their hearths and homes for the first time in the history. The Quit India Movement though not strategized by Gandhi, brought out a much larger participation including youth, adolescents and even children from both urban and rural India.

Satyagraha brought hope, consciousness and fearlessness to India. After the struggle for freedom in 1857, the country was groping for ways and means to be free from the British rule. The Indian leadership was divided among those who sought to bring freedom through parliamentary means, those who employed or tried to employ violent means and those who would be satisfied by certain reforms like increase of number in Indian Civil Service, or some degree of autonomy to local bodies, etc. who were directly involved. They may not have all courted arrest or participated in some demonstration, but the close relatives had. Then there was a much wider circle of friends and acquaintances who were touched directly or indirectly by thesatyagraha. Then there was the media who provided news in spite of the efforts of the government to suppress them. All these

together highlighted by the extraordinary courage and sacrifice of some of the satyagrahis resulted in conscientisation never known to previous history.

One of the most obvious impacts that could be perceived in the nonviolent movement was the amount of courage that it brought to the Indian masses. During his year of silent travelling throughout the length and breadth of the country, Gandhi was shocked to see the feeling of fear that the British rule had created in the colony. Fear prevented people from expressing themselves freely. This was true not only about the dumb millions of villagers but perhaps more true about the sophisticated, educated dwellers of the cities and towns. Fear often appeared among them in the form of psychofancy, flattery or deceit in their spoken or written language. Even the resolutions tof some of the national parties had to be framed in round about and complicated language. With the advent of satyagraha fear evaporated from the atmosphere. Children who tried to hide behind their mother's sarees at the appearance of uniformed British personnel, joyfully shouting national slogans at the very appearance of these officers, youths bared their chests in front of pointed guns and women courted arrest in their thousands. Gandhi's insistence in keeping the movement open and never to resort to secrecy played a magical part in removing fear out of the national psyche.

How could the spirit of millions survive in spite of the obvious failure of the national movements and the gaps between them for such long periods? Because in-between such national movements there were always a number of small movements with definite achievable goals. These local movements were born out local issues. They were spread throughout the country and they involved such a large number of local leaders.

The local satyagrahas, like Kheda, Borsad and Bardoli satyagrahas, Vykome satyagraha in Travancore (Kerala), Guru ka bag satyagraha in Punjab, and a number of satyagrahas on all the three coasts of the Indian peninsula during and following the civil disobedience of 1930-32 were spread in almost every corner of the country. Particular incidents of bravery and self-sacrifice appeared for example on the Baleshwar coast of Orissa, Midnapur in Bengal, and all over the coasts in Andhra, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Even in places like Northwest Frontier, Punjab, UP, Bihar and Assam, far removed from the sea, there were local satyagrahas. These satyagrahas drew on an amazing lot of fresh nonviolent leadership. Some of these played a very significant part in the national movement that followed.

Local nonviolent resistance movements definitely helped in

1. Creating a fresh young leadership
2. Spreading the overall movement
3. Touching new sections of society like fishermen, salt-workers, forest dwellers and tribals.

All the Satyagraha movements particularly the local satyagrahas were inevitably preceded or followed by 'Constructive Work'. It was the constructive work that served as the backbone of the satyagraha campaigns. Constructive Work was an absolutely original idea in Indian politics. It was the positive side of the independence struggle. Every revolution tries a rotten society and hopes to build a new society. Most of the revolutionaries throughout the world were more or less clear in their mind about the system of society they wanted to change. But their vision of the

society they envisaged was not that clear to them. Hence even successful revolutions were able to topple down a system, but the system that took over was hardly any different from the previous one. Qualitatively it hardly made any difference. The revolutions could raze a rule or a system to the ground but they could not raise new systems instead. Gandhi's vision of constructive work was to build a nonviolent society. He worked simultaneously for building a new society while he was fighting against the alien rule.

Because Gandhi was concerned about changing the system as a whole, he went on introducing new items to the constructive programme. The number of these activities increased from three to five and then 13 to 15 and in 1940s the number increased to eighteen. Even then Gandhi told the workers that this was not an exhaustive list. The list he envisaged could increase from time to time according to the needs of the country.

Constructive work touched various aspects of life like economic, social, educational, cultural and political. Through these activities hundreds of constructive workers could approach the masses of India. It also provided full or partial employment and relief during natural or manmade disasters. Constructive work also helped in conscientising the masses of India.

The secret of whatever success the constructive work brought to the people of India basically depended on the quality of the workers. It was here that the Gandhi's Ashrams and his Ashram Observances played a significant part. Gandhi's Ashram at Sabarmati initially worked as a training centre for constructive workers, satyagrahis spread out throughout the country and they succeeded to transform the individual life of the Ashramites as well as the social life of a number of villages around them. The moral and spiritual strength of Gandhi's ashrams developed around the eleven ashram observances that Gandhi introduced for himself and his co-workers after years of self-introspection, self-examination and self-purification. It was these eleven vows that formed the foundations of Gandhi's life. Five of them viz. truth, nonviolence, non-stealing, non-possession and Brahmacharya of celibacy were borrowed from Indian culture. Two others -- fearlessness and control of the palate, served as auxillaries to strengthen the observance. The other four observances were obviously born out of the need of the hour for his countrymen. They were equal respect for all religions, rejection of untouchability, swadeshi and bread labour.

This in brief is a picture of the Strategy of the non-violent movement led by Gandhi in the first half of the twentieth century. His organic growth may be compared to a growth of a mango tree. The spirituality of the Ashrams was like its roots, social, economic, cultural strength was in the multiple activities and the political growth in the form of various satyagrahas was like the flowers and fruits of the mango tree.

Annapoorna Maharana brilliantly represented all the three aspects of the nonviolent national strategy. She developed her moral and spiritual personality in the Ashrams of Orissa; she worked for basic education, women's emancipation, Khadi and village industry as part and parcel of Gandhi's constructive programme. She actively participated in satyagrhas launched by Gandhi, courted arrest before Independence and worked ceaselessly for the Bhoodan movement led by Vinoba Bhave. In fact her whole life was a role model for scores of men and women working in the non-violent struggle.





[Gopabandhu Choudhury]



[Rama Devi Choudhury]



[Manmohan Chaudhury]



[Annapurna Maharana]

Philosophy of Non-Violence

by

Jitendra Nath Mohanty

Jitendra Nath Mohanty

Professor Jitendra Nath Mohanty is one of the greatest living philosophers of this era. He had University education in India and received his doctorate from Gottingen University. He a philosopher with an unusually broad range in both Western and Eastern thought. He has authored many scholarly books and numerous articles on different areas of philosophy including epistemology, logic, and phenomenology. One of the most important works is "Logic, Truth and Modalities: From a phonological perspective". He has held many prestigious academic positions; notably among them is in honorary Fellowship of the All Souls College, Oxford, Gold Medal from the Asiatic Society and Humboldt Prize from the German Government. He is brother of Annapurna Maharana in the sense that his mother Basanta Kumari is sister of Shri Gopabandhu Choudhury.

PHILOSOPHY OF NON-VIOLENCE

Jitendra Nath Mohanty

This essay is dedicated to the ennobling memory of my sister Smt. Annapurna Maharana, who passed away at the age of 96 in Cuttack.I have grown up under her shadow.A great social worker, Gandhian and untiring, she and her husband Sarat Chandra Maharana both walked the length and breadth of the country.She did not go to any school, but was schooled at home by my uncle Sri Gopabandhu Chaudhury, and mastered languages and complicated concepts better than many school children. She then took her knowledge and passed it on to many children, by teaching in a basic education school in Bari, Orissa.She was passionate, intelligent, and talented.She sang beautifully, and at the end of her life she sang songs in praise of Jagannath, even though she never entered the great temple at Puri.I write this essay in her memory, knowing fully well that I cannot reach her high intellectual and moral standards.

* * *

Nonviolence

There are several interrelated concepts, non-violence, non-cooperation, and loving the other.I will try to unravel these concepts as I understand them.

Nonviolence is a negation, i.e., as the word suggests, it is the absence of violence, as much as 'non-injury' means not injuring any one.But in order to suggest 'absence of violence' it suggests, or rather presupposes a society or a relationship in which violence prevails.What then is violence?It is not mere killing or destroying the other.There is violence involved in killing an animal, or even a plant.But its absence, i.e. not killing, is not enough to constitute non-violence of Gandhian type.In a non-Gandhian society, everyone is not killing everyone else. In any society someone kills someone else.Jean-Jacques Rousseau appreciated this concept when he pointed out that in a pre-civil society, the members destroy each other.

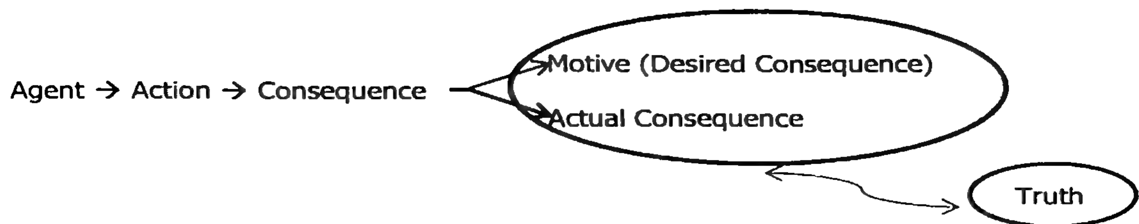
Society begins with a contract which allows the rich to rule and the poor to obey.This type of society is not yet Gandhian in nature.The citizens, even if they respect each other's roles in Society, are still practicing violence.Violence is not actual killing; it is *exploitation*, economic and political.Absence of such exploitation is the minimum that is required for Gandhian *ahimsā*.It is not a state of mind, not a subjective desire to destroy.Actually, in a capitalist society, the rich industrialist harbors no intention to kill his workers, nor does he want to deprive them of their benefits.In fact, he pays them what is their due.Indeed, he may be paying them a most liberal wage.Still the situation and the society which tolerates this is not yet Gandhian.Gandhi understood this very well, and sometimes spoke about 'trusteeship'.But this only describes one half of what he meant.Sometimes, he gave an extreme example, such as killing an animal to relieve it of pain, to make his point.

So what is Gandhian non-violence?Underlying it is the concept of 'truth' and 'love'. I will now try to explicate this relation.'Satyāgrahi' is the person who is practicing 'satyāgraha'.'Satyāgraha means, literally, 'āgraha' or attachment to 'satya' or 'truth', or to the Gandhian - finding the truth

of non-violence.'Truth', in common parlance becomes 'a true proposition or fact'.Vātsāyana, is his Nyāayabhāsya, explains it as 'tadvatitatprakārakatva', i.e., having the same predicate as the subject.But in the strictly metaphysical, logical sense, truth equals the *satya.*'Satyāgraha' then means attachment (*āgraha*) to truth.But the Gandhian practitioner of *satyāgraha* must be in opposition, and not attached to anything. That seems to be a contradiction.

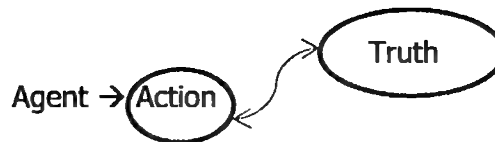
Truth of an action, Gandhi says, lies not in the consequence, not in its motive, but rather in the action itself. The Gandhian *satyāgrahi* performs an action without any motive or attachment to consequences. The scheme of an action ordinarily is:

Non-Gandhian relation of truth and action:



The Gandhian agent has no attachment to consequences of action. He is a non-attached performer.He reduces himself to *nothing.*The action itself is everything.

Gandhian relation of truth and action:



In order to understand this clearly, one must distinguish between several concepts which generally get mixed up:

action, *truth*, and *love*

The Gandhian wants or claims to love everyone or possibly God.But let me leave out 'God', for that is a theological concept hard to deal with rationally.The Satyāgrahi may be an atheist.He may still pursue 'truth' without believing in God.Gandhi used to say 'God is truth', but later changed it to 'Truth is God'.

The other concept, often mixed up with these, is 'love'.Trying to understand between Gandhian satyāgraha' and love', we have to proceed slowly.Love may be self-love or love of the other. In both cases, there may be spiritual love or cosmal love.Sensual love is what ordinary people ordinarily mean by 'love'.Gandhi did not entertain it. He practiced '*brahmacharya*' after a certain age.Is it 'spiritual love' that he meant, or what is meant when you say 'love your neighbour'.

But in so construing the basic Gandhian principle of nonviolence, I cannot dobetter than drawing upon a lecture, I heard by Vinoba Bhave.(Vinoba himself was generally recognized as the

mostauthentic Gandhian.) Vinoba pointed out that the full potentiality of the principle of nonviolence is not yet recognized by Gandhian thinkers.

The approach they generally took as an individual, andas a Gandhian follower, facing a large army or a group of (British) policemen, suffering from their bayonettes or lathis, bleading or dying in effect, can end up changing the heart of the armed group.An individual or a small group's suffering may change the heart of the more powerful opposition. This was the basis of the non-cooperation movement, and is what the Gandhian movements of *Laban Satyāgraha* aimed at. My sister, Smt. Annapurna Maharana, joined this movement and was briefly detained for selling the salt which the British had declared to be illegal.

Vinoba realised that this is to be expected in a face-to-face situation, and fails in the case of a situation where the opponent and the resister do not meet face to face.Consider the case of the group of men who flew over Japan, and threw the atom bomb on Japanese soil.No Japanese saw them while the bombs weredropped on them, nor did the pilots who dropped the bombs see the people on whom the bomb was thrown.The devastation that was caused did not change anyone's mind.It only led to a greater industrialisation of Japan, a better government, but no development of a rural decentralized economy, which was a Gandhian idea.The Gandhian picture fails in this situation. The dropping of the atom bomb was not considered to be a face-to-face torture that could result in satyāgraha by the Gandhian traditional thinker.No one's heart was changed.War stopped because of 'fear'.

Athough Kant and Hegel lived in a different place (Europe) at a time (18^{th} – 19^{th}centuries)than the Mahatma, their concerns were notfar fromGandhi's concerns:- how to stop war and bring about peace. Kant wrote a small piece on War and Peace and the idea of governments.Hegel seemingly glorified war but thought that peace can come only when a rational order is established in Europe. Kant's moral thinking gives the impression as if he was individualistic but only his first two categorical imperatives are individualistic, but the idea ofthe third categorical imperative:*an act has to satisfy the conditions of the realisation of the community of ends in themselves.*This last categorical imperative is Gandhian.Hegel's communitarianism (the theory that there is no individual as such, butonly as a member of a community) was joined with his historicism (with the development of history, a rational community comes into being). In a perfectly rational order, there would be a perfectly ethical society and a rational state.This paragraph is not intended to show that Kant and Hegel were Gandhians.My intention has been to show that Kant and Hegel restled with the same problem as Gandhi did. Gandhian thought is not old fashion and antiquated.One has to think, however, deeply about its possibilities.

In his ideal society, Gandhi wants to abandon all inaction.He wanted that as far as possiblethe means of productionshould be owned by the workers themselves, instead ofdoneby machine-based production.Machine-based production would concentrate the production and distribution in the hands of the few. He was not completely against machines, only opposed to 'machines mastering us'.He often usedthe Singer sewing machineas an exampleof a helpful machine of which he approved. It helped human labor, increased its efficiency, but did not get rid of the human labor itself.

Gandhian philosophy may be understood in two ways.It may be understood as a call to return to an idealized *past*, or it may be understood as a vision of the future. I prefer the second. If Gandhi himself explained the role of the spinning wheel, that was, first to meet the needs of the time (e.g. the British rule) and secondly, to symbolize what may come in the future. I prefer to take the spinning wheel as a symbol of what may be achieved in the process of history.

For one who is frustrated with the technological civilisation of the west, it is not uncommon to look for a remote south sea Island or a Himalayan village as the paradise where noneof the evils of modern civilisation are found.There is no poverty (in the sense of no contest between the rich and the poor), no money-based economy and no aggressive behavior.There is perfect adaptation between man and nature (and so no ecological problems which beset the industrialized world), where educationand culture are community centered and not abstractly universal.Such a picture of a perfect enclave in the remote seas oramidstmountains is not uncommon.One wants to preserve it against in-roads of modernity, as a monument to human goodness and to the possibility of peace and happiness.

In the *Hind Swaraj*, we were given the picture of the village centered civilisation, with its barter economy, nature oriented life, natural therapy, work-centered education, all being destroyed by modern industry, medicine, and economy.Gandhi would not have been the great man he was if he were merely a romantic, yearning for an idealized past. He was a realist dealing with romantic notions. Trying to do so, he discovered to his dismay, thatno village in the state of Gujarat had a spinning wheel.The decentralized economy must have been destroyed a long time ago. Heset about to revive it, with the Gandhian principle of *swadeshi*.Swadeshi requires you to depend on the resources of your immediate environment, for the basic needs of life, like food and clothing, and for the cultural goods which are to beautify life.It also imposes the obligation to preserve and enrich that environment.Swadeshi also requires that leadership comes from the people themselves.This stops the exploitation and the violence. This is what leads to a non-violent society.

Non-violence is not a call to return to an idealized past, but is a principle which may help us to cope with the historical process of development of science and technology.

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Annapurna Maharana was one of those who devoted her life to leading a Gandhian mode of living, working out a Gandhian society and thereby gained an insight into the possibilities and promises of Gandhi's thought.





['Pratinidhis' of KGNM Trust]



[Annapurna Das and Annapurna Maharana]



[Annapurna Maharana]

Gandhiji's Economic Thinking

by

Nilakantha Rath

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Professor Nilakantha Rath is a highly reputed economist of long standing, with a long and rich background in the field of applied economic research in Indian rural realities in areas such as agriculture, co-operation, land reforms, regional imbalances, economics of irrigation and water use. After undergraduate education at the Ravenshaw College in Cuttack, he undertook research in economics as a student and a faculty member at the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics in Pune. He became a household name through his collaborative research with Professor V. M. Dandekar, published in 1970, on the definition, incidence and spread of poverty; work that continues to resonate in contemporary policy discussions about poverty in the country. He has been director of the Gokhale Institute, and a member of the Board of Directors of NABARD, of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, and of the Orissa State Planning Board. Three decades of outstanding teaching of economics at the Gokhale Institute is one of his most enduring and widely recognised legacies. Since retiring from the Gokhale Institute, Professor Rath is associated with the Indian School of Political Economy in Pune. He is an active and thoughtful commentator on economic and social issues of the day, writing regularly about them in both Marathi and Odia periodicals. He also translates a wide range of interesting material ranging from social policy to literature between the two languages. He was closely acquainted with Annapurna Maharana, and his father, Dr. Radhanath Rath, the long-time editor of the Odia daily 'Samaj', was her fellow social activist, freedom fighter and a Cabinet member in the ministry of her uncle Shri Nabakrushna Choudhury.

GANDHIJI'S ECONOMIC THINKING

Nilakantha Rath

Gandhiji was not an economist. He was a social thinker, reformer and activist. His economic thinking was only a part of his personal and social ethics. He considered economic and ethical principles as two sides of the same coin. He first put down his thoughts on the subjects in a set of essays he wrote on board a ship to South Africa from England in November, 1909. He was in England for four months in connection with the problems of the Indians in Transvaal (South Africa). There he thought about the problem of Home Rule in India, talked with many people, read books by European and Indian writers and came to a set of conclusions which he put down, on board the ship, first in Gujarati and then translated by himself in to English and published in his periodical, Indian Opinion, in 1910, under the title Hind Swaraj. This book was later revised and printed, the final edition being in 1939. It contains Gandhiji's thoughts on Indian society, the impact of British rule and European thought on Indian readers and society and his thoughts on what is right or wrong with it and what needs to be done for Indian society. While his thought on the economic organisation of Indian society is only a part, indeed an integral part, of his thought on Indian home rule, based on the two basic ethical values of Truth and Ahimsa (non-violence), we shall consider here only his thoughts and formulations relating to economic organisation of society.

It is necessary to start with his statements relating to the economy. Gandhiji says that the problems of Indian society arose out of the imposition by the English as well as adoption by many Indians of what he calls the European civilization (which by 1939 he preferred to call the modern civilization). In the book he formulates questions by the reader and seeks to answer them as the editor. In response to the Reader's query about what he has read and thought about this civilization, Gandhiji replies (and I quote):

"Let us first consider what set of things is described by the word 'civilization'. Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life. We will take some examples. The people in Europe today live in better built houses than they did a hundred years ago. This is considered as an emblem of civilization, and this is also a matter to promote bodily happiness. Formerly they wore skins and used spears as their weapons. Now they wear long trousers, and, for embellishing their bodies, they wear a variety of clothing, and instead of spears, they carry with them revolvers containing five or more chambers. If people of a certain country, who have hitherto not been in the habit of wearing much clothing, boots, etc., adopt European clothing, they are supposed to have become civilized out of savagery. Formerly, in Europe, people ploughed their lands mainly by manual labour. Now one man can plough a vast tract by means of steam engines and can thus amass great wealth. This is called a sign of civilization. Formerly, only a few men wrote valuable books. Now, anybody writes and prints anything he likes and poisons people's minds. Formerly, men travelled in wagons. Now, they fly through theair in trains at the rate of four hundredand more miles per day. This is considered the height of civilization. It has been stated that, as men progress, theyshall be able to travel in airships and reach any part of the world in a few hours. Men will not need the use of their hands and feet. They will press a button, and theywill have their clothing by their side.They will press another button, and they will have

their newspaper. A third and a motor-car will be in waiting for them. They will have a variety of delicately dished up food. Everything will be done by machinery. Formerly, when people wanted to fight with one another, they measured between them their bodily strength; now it is possible to take away thousands of lives by one man working behind a gun from a hill. This is civilization. Formerly, men worked in the open air only as much as they liked. Now thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance work in factories or mines. Theircondition is worse than that of beasts. They are obliged to work, at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations, for the sake of millionaires. Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy. There are now diseases of which people never dreamt before, and an army of doctors is engaged in finding out their cures, and so hospitals have increased. This is a test of civilization. Formerly, special messengers were required and much expense was incurred in order to send letters; today, anyone can abuse his fellow by means of a letter for one penny. True, at the same cost, one can send one's thanks also. Formerly, people had two or three meals consisting of home-made bread and vegetables; now, they require something to eat every two hours so that they have hardly leisure for anything else. What more need I say? All this you can ascertain from several authoritative books. These are all true tests of civilization. And if anyone speaks to the contrary, know that he is ignorant. This civilization takes note neither of morality nor of religion. Its votaries calmly state that their business is not to teach religion. Some even consider it to be a superstitious growth. Others put on the cloak of religion, and prate about morality. But, after twenty years' experience, I have come to the conclusion that immorality is often taught in the name of morality. Even a child can understand that in all I have described above there can be no inducement to morality. Civilization seeks to increase bodily comforts, and it fails miserably even in doing so.

This civilization is irreligion, and it has taken such a hold on the people in Europe that those who are in it appear to be half mad. They lack real physical strength or courage. They keep up their energy by intoxication. They can hardly be happy in solitude. Women, who should be the queens of households, wander in the streets or they slave away in factories. For the sake of a pittance, half a million women in England alone are labouring under trying circumstances in factories or similar institutions. This awful fact is one of the causes of the daily growing suffragette movement.

This civilization is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed. According to the teaching of Mahomed this would be considered a Satanic Civilization. Hinduism calls it the Black Age. I cannot give you an adequate conception of it. It is eating into the vitals of the English nation. It must be shunned. Parliaments are really emblems of slavery. If you will sufficiently think over this, you will entertain the same opinion and cease to blame the English. They rather deserve our sympathy. They are a shrewd nation and I therefore believe that they will cast off the evil. They are enterprising and industrious, and their mode of thought is not inherently immoral. Neither are they bad at heart. I therefore respect them. Civilization is not an incurable disease, but it should never be forgotten that the English people are at present afflicted by it."

Following this, talking about the conditions of India at that time under English rule, Gandhiji says, "what you and I have hitherto considered beneficial for India no longer appears to me to be

so." "Railways, lawyers and doctors have impoverished the country so much so that, if we do not wake up in time, we shall be ruined."

Explaining how railways have ruined India, Gandhiji writes: "It must be manifest to you that, but for the railways, the English could not have such a hold on India as they have. The railways, too, have spread the bubonic plague. Without them, the masses could not move from place to place. They are the carriers of plague germs. Formerly we had natural segregation. Railways have also increased the frequency of famines because, owing to facility of means of locomotion, people sell out their grain and it is sent to the dearest market. People become careless and so the pressure of famine increases. Railways accentuate the evil nature of man. Bad men fulfill their evil designs with greater rapidity. The holy places of India have become unholy. Formerly people went to these places with great difficulty. Generally, therefore, only the real devotees visited such places. Nowadays rogues visit them in order to practice their roguery." He says, even the notion of nationalism - that we are one nation - so ingrained in us, as was recognised by our great men who established the 'maths' in the "char-dhams", was destroyed by the railways, which made us think that we are different and it is the railways that were making us one nation.

Talking about lawyers, Gandhiji said, "My firm opinion is that lawyers have enslaved India, have accentuated Hindu-Mahomedan dissentions and have confirmed English authority." "Of course, lawyers are also men, and there is something good in every man. Whenever instances of lawyers having done good can be brought forward, it will be found that the good is due to them as men rather than as lawyers." "Why do they want more fees than common labourers? Why are their requirements greater? In what way are they more profitable to the country as labourers? Are those who do good entitled to greater payment? And if they have done anything for the country for the sake of money, how shall it be counted as good?" "If people were to settle their own quarrels, a third party would not be able to exercise any authority over them. Truly, men were less unmanly when they settled their disputes either by fighting or by asking their relatives to decide for them. They became more unmanly and cowardly when they resorted to the courts of law. It was certainly a sign of savagery when they settled their dispute by fighting. Is it any less so, if I ask a third party to decide between you and me? Surely, the decision of a third party is not always right. The parties alone know who is right. We, in our simplicity and ignorance, imagine that a stranger, by taking our money, gives us justice."

Similarly, with European medicine. Their (doctors') business is really to rid the body of diseases that may afflict it. How do these diseases arise? Surely by our negligence or indulgence, says Gandhiji. If I suffer due to negligence or indulgence, I shall be warned and therefore avoid it. But medicine results in repetition of my acts and a weakening of my mind and eventually a loss of control over my mind.

This formulation finally led to the question of the place of machinery in the society: if European civilization is to be driven out, what about machinery which is such an integral part of that civilization?

Gandhiji raises this question squarely and answers it at length. It is necessary to quote him in full.

"By raising this question, (of machinery, by the Reader) you have opened the wound I have

received. When I read Mr. Dutt's *Economic History of India,* I wept; and, as I think of it again. my heart sickens. It is machinery that has impoverished India. It is difficult to measure the harm that Manchester has done to us. It is due to Manchester that Indian handicraft has all but disappeared.

But I make a mistake. How can Manchester be blamed? We wore Manchester cloth and this is why Manchester wove it. I was delighted when I read about the bravery of Bengal. There were no cloth-mills in that Presidency. They were, therefore, able to restore the original hand-weaving occupation. It is true Bengal encourages the mill-industry of Bombay. If Bengal had proclaimed a boycott of *all* machine-made goods, it would have been much better.

Machinery has begun to desolate Europe. Ruination is now knocking at the English gates. Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization; it represents a great sin.

The workers in the mills of Bombay have become slaves. The condition of the women working in the mills is shocking. When there were no mills, these women were not starving. If the machinery craze grows in our country, it will become an unhappy land. It may be considered a heresy, but I am bound to say that it were better for us to send money to Manchester and to use flimsy Manchester cloththan to multiply mills in India. By using Manchester cloth we only waste our money; but by reproducing Manchester in India, we shall keep our money at the price of our blood, because our very moral being will be sapped, and I call in support of my statement the very mill-hands as witnesses. And those who have amassed wealth out of factories are not likely to be better than other rich men. It would be folly to assume that an Indian Rockefeller would be better than the American Rockefeller. Impoverished India can become free, but it will be hard for any India made rich through immorality to regain its freedom. I fear we shall have to admit that moneyed men support British rule; their interest is bound up with its stability. Money renders a man helpless. The other thing which is equally harmful is sexual vice. Both are poison. A snake-bite is a lesser poison than these two, because the former merely destroys the body but the latter destroy body, mind and soul. We need not, therefore, be pleased with the prospect of the growth of the mill-industry.

READER: Are the mills, then, to be closed down?

EDITOR: That is difficult. It is no easy task to do away with a thing that is established. We, therefore, say that the non-beginning of a thing is supreme wisdom. We cannot condemn mill owners; we can but pity them. It would be too much to expect them to give up their mills, but we may implore them not to increase them. If they would be good they would gradually contract their business. They can establish in thousands of households the ancient and sacred handlooms and they can buy out the cloth that may be thus woven. Whether the mill owners do this or not, people can cease to use machine-made goods.

READER: You have, so far spoken about machine-made cloth, but there are innumerable machine-made things. We have either to import them or to introduce machinery into our country.

EDITOR: Indeed, our gods even are made in Germany. What need, then, to speak of matches, pins and glassware? My answer can be only one. What did India do before these articles were introduced? Precisely the same should be done today. As long as we cannot make pins without machinery, so long will we do without them. The tinsel splendour of glassware we will have

nothing to do with, and we will make wicks, as of old, with home-grown cotton and use hand-made earthen saucers or lamps. So doing, we shall save our eyes and money and support Swadeshi and so shall we attain Home Rule.

It is not to be conceived that all men will do all these things at one time or that some men will give up all machine-made things at once. But, if the thought is sound, we shall always find out what we can give up and gradually cease to use it. What a few may do, others will copy; and the movement will grow like the cocoanut of the mathematical problem. What the leaders do, the populace will gladly do in turn. The matter is neither complicated nor difficult. You and I need not wait until we can carry others with us. Those will be the losers who will not do it, and those who will not do it, although they appreciate the truth; will deserve to be called cowards.

READER: What, then, of the tram-cars and electricity?

EDITOR: This question is now too late. It signifies nothing. If we are to do without the railways we shall have to do without the tramcars. Machinery is like a snake-hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes. Where there is machinery there are large cities; and where there are large cities, there are tram-cars and railways; and there only does one see electric light. English villages do not boast of any of these things. Honest physicians will tell you that where means of artificial locomotion have increased, the health of the people has suffered. I remember that when in a European town there was a scarcity of money, the receipts of the tramway company, of the lawyers and of the doctors went down and people were less unhealthy. I cannot recall a single good point in connection with machinery. Books can be written to demonstrate its evils.

READER: Is it a good point or a bad one that all you are saying will be printed through machinery?

EDITOR: This is one of those instances which demonstrate that sometimes poison is used to kill poison. This, then, will not be a good point regarding machinery. As it expires, the machinery, as it were, says to us: 'Beware and avoid me. You will derive no benefits from me and the benefit that may accrue from printing will avail only those who are infected with the machinery-craze.'

Do not, therefore, forget the main thing. It is necessary to realize that machinery is bad. We shall then be able gradually to do away with it. Nature has not provided any way whereby we may reach a desired goal all of a sudden. If, instead of welcoming machinery as a boon, we should look upon it as an evil, it would ultimately go".

So, what is civilization or, as Gandhiji put it in Gujarati, "good conduct"? Gandhiji says, India in this matter has nothing to learn from anybody. He writes -

"We notice that the mind is a restless bird; the more it gets, the more it wants, and still remains unsatisfied. The more we indulge our passions, the more unbridled they become. Our ancestors, therefore, set a limit to our indulgences. They saw that happiness was largely a mental condition. A man is not necessarily happy because he is rich or unhappy because he is poor. The rich are often seen to be unhappy, the poor to be happy. Millions will always remain poor. Observing all this, our ancestors dissuaded us from luxuries and pleasures. We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago. We have retained the same kind of cottages that we had in former times and our indigenous education remains the same as before. We have had no system of life-corroding competition. Each followed his own occupation or trade and charged a

regulation wage. It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our forefathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet. They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of our hands and feet. They further reasoned that large cities were a snare and a useless encumbrance and that people would not be happy in them, that there would be gangs of thieves and robbers, prostitution and vice flourishing in them and those poor men would be robbed by rich men. They were therefore satisfied with small villages. They saw that the kings and their swords were inferior to the sword of ethics, and they, therefore, held the sovereigns of the earth to be inferior to the Rishis and Fakirs. A nation with a constitution like this is fitter to teach others than to learn from others. This nation had courts, lawyers and doctors, but they were all within bounds. Everybody knew that these professions were not particularly superior; moreover, these *vakils* and *vaids* did not rob people; they were considered people's dependents, not their masters. Justice was tolerably fair. The ordinary rule was to avoid courts. There were no touts to lure people into them. This evil too was noticeable only in and around capitals. The common people lived independently and followed their agricultural occupation. They enjoyed true Home Rule."

Gandhiji noted that evils like wedding of infants, pregnancy of small girls, polyandry, 'Niyog' and prostitution in the name of religion existed. But, in no part of the world have all men attained perfection. The tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being. It is not God-less, but based on a belief in God. Therefore, he said, "it behoves every lover of India to cling to the old Indian civilization like the child clings to the mother's breast."

Gandhiji sums up in the end by saying in brief what we should do. He says, we should follow the Indian civilization that he has described. The lawyers and doctors should give up their profession and take to handlooms. If any patient comes to a doctor, he should "tell them the cause of their diseases, and will advise them to remove the cause rather than pamper them by giving useless drugs; he will understand that if by not taking drugs, perchance the patient dies, the world will not come to grief and he will have been really merciful to him". "If a wealthy man, he will devote his money to establishing handlooms, and encourage others to use hand-made goods by wearing them himself."

Over the years, till his death, Gandhiji never really resiled from these views. There were many occasions when different people asked him questions about his views on economy. Sometimes, when pointed out that he uses railway, motor cars, printing press, etc., he has said that these are compromises, but only transitory compromises, and are being used only to carry conviction to those willing to listen about the ultimate ethical society.

In course of discussions with Mr. P. Ceresel, a French engineer and friend of Gandhiji's friend, Romain Rolland, in 1935, Gandhiji said that the use of machine is unavoidable for such works which cannot be done by human hands but are necessary for common good. These should be under public ownership and shall be used only for public good. For example, the use of printing press and equipment for surgery will continue. Heavier machinery may be used for this. Railways are unavoidable. So are cars, though with regret. Fountain pens are also used. These are all compromises. But one should always keep one's basic objective in view. Gandhiji said, he is not against all machinery, but only such as aids human labour, not "saves human labour" by

throwing thousands out of work. So, he was all for sewing machines and the equipments to manufacture those. The same with electricity and telegraph. If every house in every village has electricity and it is used for the use of the household, then, he said, he has no objection to it. All these are compromises. But no compromise that renders thousands and lakhs unemployed is acceptable, says Gandhiji. And, ultimately any technical development that makes human labour less and less necessary is improper. It is worse than pointless, he said, to make people spend a lot of effort and time in playing fields and gymnasiums in order to keep themselves fit while doing less and less of physical labour due to industrialisation. This is what he said he is firmly against.In a speech before the ministers of development of the State Governments of India on 31stJuly 1946, Gandhiji reiterated this position of his.

In view of his compromises in regard to some types of machinery, it may appear improper to point out that his objection to railways as a device that contributed to famine appears unjustified. To take only examples that had occurred during the four decades preceding the time he was writing Hind Swaraj, one must remember that the Orissa Famine of 1866 could not be alleviated because there was no way of bringing food grain from outside by water course or train. And, the famine was due to two successive severe droughts. The same was the situation in central India that saw three successive years of famine, from 1898 to 1901, despite there being a rail line running there. Apparently, there was not enough surplus grain elsewhere and no transport facilities to carry grain from rail heads to famine stricken areas. If anything, railways was a help rather than hindrance in mitigating famine condition.

His objection to modern medicine, in Hind Swaraj, was toned down later. But, he does not appear to see that developments in the field of modern medicine, like the small pox vaccine, took place not because of exploitative desire of companies, but because a man like Jenner saw the effectiveness of cow-pox in mitigating the horror of small pox, and tried it on his own son before advocating it for wider use. James Watt's steam engine was not a product of exploitative company's work, but an outcome of sheer human curiosity. Similar were the developments of telegraph and electricity (Thomas Edison). Gandhiji would possibly have wished the results of such curiosity to be suppressed to avoid loss of mass employment, though at a later date he does not appear to fear such. He thinks Indian sages have prevented such technical developments in the past for social benefit. I wonder, if the bullock cart (or donkey cart), which did not appear to have existed at the time of Mahabharat, was later allowed to be developed and castration of bulls for having bullocks for work on fields and roads was allowed by the thinking men of ancient India, despite the adverse employment implications of such devices.

Gandhiji makes two points very strongly: one, that God has given humans hand and feet to work to the fullest, and not to be substituted by machines; and, two, that the human mind was created by God to think out what devices are likely to prevent the proper use of the hands and feet by humans and what might lead to idleness or unemployment. His insistence on human labour prevents him from accepting a significant reduction of the eight-hour work day. And, he does not advocate free food for distressed households, but work for them to earn their bread. In a letter to Pandit Gopabandhu Das in 1926, he suggested that the distressed households in the severely flood-affected areas of coastal Orissa should be put to work on charakha for spinning and de-husking of paddy. (I cannot imagine Gandhiji approving, if he were alive, the recent provision

inthe Food Security Act of India, providing for near free food to nearly two-third of the households in the country!).

He states at various times that in all societies at all times, human beings, who have both good and bad thoughts, are not perfect. Devices developed by men can similarly be well or ill-used. Like human beings can be persuaded to abandon the bad, the devices developed by them can also be prevented from doing harm. And, it is always not possible to see immediately the harm that a particular device might do to human society. For example, Gandhiji appears happy with the plough, developed thousands of years ago. But, of late, (indeed, during the last eighty years) scientists and activists have seen and, therefore, come to the conclusion that the plough is harmful to the soil. Ploughing fields for planting a crop every season leads to severe erosion of the top soil due to wind and water flow. And, soil erosion is largely an irreversible process. Hence, there is a world-wide movement now that ploughing should be abandoned and the seed should be placed with the help of seed drills a little below the surface. This is only to illustrate how the harmful effect of a device can be noticed long after it was developed.

Gandhiji's ideal state of the social economy is where human beings are located in small villages, ploughing the land with their hands and ploughs to grow the crops they need, spin the yarn for their cloth and weave them in the household for their use. ('When Adam delved and Eve span/Who was then a gentleman?'). Towns are an (unavoidable) aberration, to be just suffered. Only such machinery as helps human labour, not substitutes it, should be used.

But, one is not building a society from scratch. It exists, with all its good and evil, strengths and weaknesses. So, how to change it? Gandhiji's ethical values will not permit a forced change. Indeed, this was one of his major objections to the Indian Congress Socialists' original manifesto. He believes in and advocates persuasion of the concerned persons or groups. He was against a forced abolition of landlordism. He would have the landlords take no more than 25 per cent of the produce and hold the land as trustees on behalf of society. (The land reform by the communist govt. in West Bengal seems to have done something like that!). He did not want the textile mills to be increased in number and capacity, and to be allowed to close when the time came. All capital should be held by those who have it, including the state, as trustees of the society. Any surplus should be used for the welfare of the people.

He wished labour unions in factories, as long as factories existed, to work in an honest and responsible manner. I may give an example from personal experience. In 1978, a Committee set up by the Government of India was examining the consumer price index for industrial labour, on which depended the compensation to workers for the rise in the price level of consumer goods. The trade unions in Calcutta, led by the leftist led unions, had severely attacked the Index as a 'fraud', citing the huge rise in individual items of consumption which, according to them, was not duly reflected in the price index prepared. Explanations in a meeting of the union leaders showed they either did not understand the arithmetic or were motivated. When the same question was asked of the Majoor Mahajan - the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Union formed long ago by Gandhiji, the union leaders said they had no complaints. The reason was, they s[illegible] they had always been preparing a parallel consumer price index for Ahmedabad workers, on the lines of the procedure followed by the Labour Bureau of the Government, to check the official index and

had found nothing to complain. This is a small example of the Gandhian method of trade unionism.

He considered Charakha an ideal machinery that helps the individual to use his hands and produce a part of his need. To start with, he said, individuals who are willing to do so should spin yarn that will be sold to those that had looms to weave into cloth. And he thought that working eight hours a day on his/her charkha; a person can earn eight annas a day that would at the time (in the late nineteen thirties and early forties) meet a part of his needs. But the experience of the All India Spinners Association was that the spinners could not earn more than three annas a day. Marketing Khadi became difficult. So, Gandhiji advocated that spinners should essentially spin for their own need, and of course most people should spin their own yarn. Any surplus should be sold to the weavers. The basic need will be thereby met of every household. And, if loom owners would not or could not buy the surplus yarn, then Gandhiji's solution was that every household should have its own loom on which the needed cloth is woven as well as any surplus. The failure of the market drove him to his ideal social state. In the light of this, it is difficult to see how he would have reacted to Amber Charakha, where one spinner could spin on it in a given time almost six times the yarn that the ordinary charkha enabled.

Many persons and groups have taken up one or the other aspects of Gandhiji's advocacies. Consumerism is something that many western thinkers and advocates have tried to decry. The economist Veblen talked about it. And the latest is Pope Francis in his very recent pronouncement. Decentralised location of industrial production, even of the more recent goods like small transistor radios and the more recent mobile phones, not to speak of ready-made garments, has been advocated and tried out. Income inequality and its various consequences are the worries in many societies. And, solutions to these are sometimes thought of as Gandhian solutions to our economic problems. But, in reality, to Gandhiji these were transitory solutions. If they fail, as in case of spinning, he was logical enough to drive it to his form of household and village self-sufficiency, which is the most ethical system of social organisation. Mao-tse-dung tried out village (commune) self-sufficiency. But his efforts to apply that to manufacture of iron and steel failed disastrously. And, opening of the country with development of roads and railways led to specialisation in agricultural production and therefore end to village or commune self-sufficiency. Gandhiji was perceptively against trade. And population control was not his problem. He believed in and advocated sexual restraint by every married couple. And, if village self-sufficiency, lack of trade and of unnecessary movements outside the village did not reduce sufficiently the incidence of diseases, then naturopathy is the solution. If this too fails, death is not to be mourned.

This is Gandhiji's ideal state of social and individual existence. He accepts that human mind, like his hands and feet, are God given, and man uses it and should use it to control self and society to tread the ethical path. He recognises that there is human weakness, but thinks that by proper persuasion most people can be made to see and behave properly. One wonders, why the same thinking mind cannot try to persuade individuals and groups to see and control the evils of machinery, consumerism and inequality and unemployment with the development of machine based society. (Gandhiji tried to *persuade* the British for 27 years to quit India). That is what many groups and societies in many countries are trying to do, with of course varied success. This has the merit of allowing the human mind to think and act freely, a freedom that of course can

result in things that are both useful and harmful, as always. Apparently, Gandhiji was very unsure of the ability of human mind and social organisations to be able to recognise and control the evil consequences of such developments. Hence his insistence on his ideal state. To my mind, the working for an ethical society, whatever the nature of technical development, and the formation of economic and social organisations and policies to this end appear, therefore, the basic legacy of the Gandhian thinking.

[The quotations from Gandhiji's writings reproduced here are from the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, published by the Publication Division of the Government of India.]

My Tribute

Chuni Apaa (Annapurna Maharana), who was so much older to me, knew me from my childhood. Our two families were old Congress nationalist families and her father was my father's senior. She would recount to me my slogans of the childhood. She became an activist quite early in life. Therefore, our meetings were few and far between, particularly after I moved to Pune for education and later work. It is only in the last ten years of her life that we met regularly every year and had long conversations. I read her autobiographical writings. They are a source of a part of Odisha's social history in the pre and post-independence era. Reading these accounts one sees the dispassionate character of the author, her commitment to causes and her sense of equanimity, something that she shares with her famous mother. She was closely associated with the Kasturba Trust and helped me to be associated with it in a tiny way. Though she was the daughter of a famous father and mother and was married to a man of impeccable honesty and even temper, she was an independent thinker and worker. Like her brother, she did not go to college and university but was a very widely read person and deeply interested in issues of social importance. This is what made conversation with her such a pleasant and rewarding affair. She helped me identify a suitable person when I was looking for a person from the former untouchable class in our state to write about his childhood and youth, his upbringing in the society of the time and the way they lived and were treated. Her long association with the nationalist and Sarvodaya movements are an unforgettable part of our social history of the times. It is remarkable that in the conversations with her, despite our very old association, the family and personal matters rarely came up. Despite her growing physical limitations, she was ever a cool, smiling and active conversationalist, indeed discussant of issues, till the very end. I considered it a privilege that I had the opportunity to meet her whenever I went to Cuttack and received her affection and advice. It is persons like Chuni Apaā that contribute to the observation and preservation of the ethical values that Gandhiji wished his countrymen to follow. I can never forget this great lady.



Deepa Laxmi: The Aesthetics of Empathy

by

Shailaj Rabi

Shailaj Rabi

Rabindranath Sahoo, writing under the pseudonym, Sailaj Rabi, is a well-knownOdia poet, literary critic and columnist though as a whole timer hehad a short stint in Sarvoday movement,he remained a lifelongadmirer of Annapurna Maharana's personality and literary works beingin close contact with her till her death.

He was imprisoned for sixmonths in 1975 for his opposition to proclamation of 'Emergency' inIndia. With five collections of poems, five translation works, twoedited volumes in Odia to his credit he was awarded the State SahityaAkademi Award in poetry for 2002 which he declined. He edited an Englishbimonthly 'Parents & Pedagogues' in the 1980's and wrote a biography of Vinoba for children in English entitled 'A *strange Beggar*'. Now he is editingthe complete works of Manmohan Choudhury (4 volumes already published).He is also the editor of the Weekly 'The Sarvoday' - the Odia mouthpiece of Sarvoday movement.

Deepa Laxmi: The Aesthetics of Empathy

Shailaj Rabi

Every century has its own agenda of spirituality and every kind of discourse within a period also defines its own variety of spirituality. For example, the spirituality of our contemporary India is heavily tinged with politics of social justice and thoroughly impacted by technological and media explosion. But within this period also the so-called New Age spirituality differs as much from the conventional pastoral-*puranic* spirituality as the latter differed from the spirituality of the revivalist movements – *dwai a-adwai a* divide, notwithstanding. Spirituality of Gandhi and Vinoba seem to be twice removed from that of all the above three. Besides stressing the role of *sadhana* in personal life, all the above three share another feature in common. All of them instruct charity as their community action. This is also true of all other institutional world religions (including the so-called *gandhigiri*).

Sarvoday of Gandhi and Vinoba, on the other hand, while emphasising the importance of spiritual *sadhana* in personal life, shares one aspect with revolutionary socialmovements. It aims at radical structural change in the existing social order.Charity is more a manifestation of sympathy (in the conventional sense), a kind of condescension, while Sarvoday is marked by empathy, the identification of 'I' with the'Other', in one's daily life as well as in social practice. Unlike sympathy, empathy ismore affective than cognitive. This feeling of empathy has goaded revolutionaries tomake death-defying sacrifices for the victims of injustice. Of course, mystics and somereligious sects emphasize the importance of identification of the individual self withuniversal selfand prescribe austere life of the poor for their followers. But they are hardly interested in fighting against the status quo, against the evils structurally embedded in the existing social system. Because of its deep engagement with the socio-economic problems, Sarvoday movement is sometimes misrepresented as either a political movement or social-reform movement or as merely voluntarism withhandful of constructive programmes.

But as Gandhi and Vinoba have time and again reminded the world, Sarvoday is essentially a spiritual movement. It tries to spiritualise the mundane quests which are political, economic, social or cultural in nature. Seen from this angle Sarvoday is a unique experiment both in spiritual as well as in mundane realm. Gandhiji called it his "Experiment with Truth".

It would not be out of place to note here that Gandhiji like the leaders of various institutional religions, at one time declared, "God is Truth". But later he replaced that maxim with "Truth is God". According to Marx, Hegel made Dialectic stand on its head. Marx thought, "It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."[1] Going beyond the straight-jacket debate of idealist-materialist dichotomy, one can safely put these words in Gandhiji's mouth and claim for Gandhism the discovery of 'the rational kernel' of Truth within the mystical-religious shell. Gandhiji, it seems, with a little twist, turned Truth "right side up again." This upright Truth is broad based and inclusive, as Gandhiji pointed out.Even an atheist can embrace it as his credo.

Annapurna Maharana (hence forward, 'Appā') introduced herself time and again as a'guinea pig' in Gandhiji's lab. "An ignorant fourteen-year-old girl," Appā says with her characteristic humility, "instead of treading the bitten path, volunteered to be a guinea pig in Mahatma Gandhi's laboratory. Devotion was her only virtue."[2]Appā's devotion for Gandhi and Gandhism was unconditional and total. So much so that on her first night with her husband in bed, she reminded him, "Gandhiji is your only rival in receiving my love, reverence and devotion." But her surrender to Gandhiji was not the passive surrender of a guinea pig. Her life, like those of all sincere Gandhians was an unending experiment with Truth.

In the postscript to her *magnum opus*, her memoir, *Amru a Anubhaba*, Appā pointed out the real motivation behind writing that memoir. In her self-effacing playful style, she recounts, "M/S Siksa Sandhana have at last pieced together bits of my writings and are hell bent to print them. In my opinion, there should be a lot of thinking and screening before a work is published. Only those works which will benefit the society should get published. Printing of a book involves destruction of forest, erosion of soil and pollution of environment - thus opine men of wisdom. Hence I wished to distance myself from this misadventure which is harmful for the society.

"Then why again did I go for writing this? The edict of Manu Maharaj (the ancient lawgiver) proclaims that a woman before marriage must be under the tutelage of her parents. After marriage the husband must take over. And in her old age, she must be protected by her son. I, of course, don't want to be anybody's protégée. But even then I followed my son Jnanadeva's advice. He had a point. He argued, 'a scientist keeps record of his experiments and applications. He documents them so that those who research in that line can benefit from that. The experiments you people made through satyagraha or nonviolent resistance should be documented so that social scientists benefit by that.'

"I laughed to myself. How on earth, the experiences of an illiterate girl of 1920's can benefit learned scientists! But the next moment it dawned upon me - after all, these illiterate girls joined Gandhi's movement in hundreds and thousands. How did they perceive that movement? What was the nature of their activities? What transformation that movement brought about in their lives? - I thought these questions are worthy of being addressed by social scientists. The experiences of those guinea pigs of Gandhiji are worthy of documentation. Hence I am writing down my experiences."[3]

Written in the *apologia* tradition of the antiquity, in the above quotation she makes an oblique remark that writing down her reminiscences would be an unproductive exercise. The statement was obviously made out of humility. But if Marx's definition of unproductive labour is accepted, not only the writing of her memoir but her corpus as awhole will have enough entitlement to qualify for that certificate. In his *Theories of Surplus-Value*, Marx explains the difference between productive and unproductive labour succinctly: "The same kind of labour may be *productive* or *unproductive*. For example, Milton, who wrote *Paradise Lost* for five pounds, was an *unproductivelabourer*. On the other hand, the writer who turns out stuff for his publisher in factory style is a*productive labourer*. Milton produced *Paradise Lost* for the same reason a silkworm produces silk. It was an activity of *his* nature. Later he sold the product for 5 pounds. But the literary proletarian of Leipzig, who fabricated books (for example, Compedia of

Economics) under the direction of his publisher, is a *productive labourer*; for his product is from the outset subsumed under capital, and comes into being only for the purpose of increasing that capital."(italicby Marx).[1]

Out of thirty works she penned, twenty one are translations from other languages. As I have heard, she took totranslation to supplement the meagre honorarium her husband used to get as an activist. In fact, the whole-timer activist couple lived just hand to mouth with two children to raise. But her earnings from translation was as paltry as the five pounds of Milton because her translation was limited to only Sarvoday literature. With twenty one successful translation works to her credit, she could have been an enviable possession in any big publisher's stable. After independence, she could have signed contract for translation with such prestigious organisations as National Book Trust of India or Sahitya Akademi. Besides being handsomely paid, she would have had the pleasure of doing some purely 'creative' translation for which she had already proved her mettle. But though financial compulsion was her usual effacing excuse, she had not taken up translation work just for a living. Nor as a pastime. She took up this calling with a missionary zeal. Even one can say, her enthusiasm for itverged on evangelical ardour – a pious yearning to strengthen her faith and share it with others. The sense of urgency and commitment that goaded her can be well appreciated from the fact that even in the thick of the relief operation in Kalahandi, where fifteen to twenty thousand famine victims were being fed daily, she completed the translation of two Sarvoday classics,*Satyagraha in South Africa* by Gandhiji and *Sthitaprajnayakā Lakshan* by Vinoba. The sense of dedication and commitment that spurred her on to take up translation can be understood from a confession she makes in this regard, "when I took up translation, I thought my life practices should be in sync with the instructions laid down in the book I was translating. Therefore, during translation, I picked up one moral from that particular work and tried to put that to practice. No doubt, this proved beneficial for me but within a short time I realized, how difficult it was to put those instructions to practice. For examples, I was translating Gandhiji's commentary on *'Anāsakti Yoga'* (the yoga of non-attachment) from the 12thChapter of *Bhagabat Gita*[5]. I stumbled upon the *sloka,*

यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते च यः ।

हर्षामर्ष भयोद्वेगैर्मुक्तो यः स च मे प्रियः ।।

(One who does not cause worry to others, nor is pained by the worry inflicted on him by others; one who is free from pleasure, anger, envy, fear and worry is dear to me). I triedmy level best for one full year to put this message to practice. But for a woman with children, it seemed well-nigh impossible to practice it. Rabindranath has graphically described the anxious moments a mother sometimes passes through, 'fear grabs me lest I loose thee in a moment of distraction.' When a child goes to the river for bath or to school and does not return in time, or when there is thunder and lightning and the child is on his way home from school, the mother is on tenterhooks. One has only to go through such an experience to realise what an arduous task is it to get oneself freed from worry in such a situation. Yet I did not give up. I know the value of endeavour. That the constant effort on my part helped me to whittle and preserve my ill-shaped life became clear to me in short time".[6]

Thus forAppā, translation, or for that matter writing, was not mere pen pushing for a living nor was it just a creative pastime. It was, as we have observed earlier, part of a mission. Like a silkworm producing silk, she was writing out of an inner compulsion. It was an activity of her personality.

Besides Odia, her mother tongue, she was conversant in a few other languages, such as, English, Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Gujrati and Urdu. She has translated in Odia works of Gandhi, Vinoba, Mashruwalla, J. P., Sankar Rao Deo, Narahari Parekh and Nirmal Kumar Bose. Transcreation of Gandhiji's *Hind Swaraj*, Vinoba's *Talks on Gita* and Parekh's*Who are the Murderers of Gandhi?*are most popular among her translation works. With her thorough creative comprehension of the original and command over both the languages, her translation works are models of translation. They read like original Odia work. *Bhagabata Dharma Sara*, Vinobaji's commentary in Hindi on Odia Srimat Bhagabata, was first translated by another writer. But Acharya Harihara, the famous Gandhian stalwart and scholar along with Vinobaji himself compared that translation with a sample of Appā and got it translated again by Appā.

She has nine original works in Odia. Out of that five are short biographies of women freedom fighters of Odisha; one narrates, in running commentary style, the famous surrender of Chambal dacoits before Vinoba (1972); two are short tracts on the politics of salt. And there is one brilliant book for children on star-gazing. None of these books contains more than 70 to 80 pages. Her main target group being either half-literate adults or children she used in those books a highly readable popular style and put them in an affordable format.

Bycontrast, *Amru a Anubhaba* (Sacred Memories), her memoir is a veritable tome running into five hundred pages.[7] Taking into consideration its style and size, it squarely fits into the category, known in literary circles by the jargon 'creative literature'. Thus as creative literature, it is virtually her maiden work, her best work and last work and needless to say, a milestone in Odia literature. Not for nothing, it was awarded Sarala Puraskar (2006), the most prestigious literary award in Odisha.

The book contains a sub-title - within brackets- 'Autobiography'. This author came to learn that the sub-title was added by the publisher to the original title at the time of printing. The sub-title is a misnomer. As we have said earlier it is a bunch of reminiscences. Of course, it is not random congeries but a systematic collection arranged in historical order. Though told in first person, it is not the story of her life but a collection of stories culled from her life. It is a palimpsest with layers of memories - fond memories of movements, events and people she encountered during her sacred voyage in search of Truth. Hence the title.

Neither the first-person speaker nor her family is at the center of discussion, as normally is found in autobiographies. They are relegated to the penumbra of periphery. Freedom movement and other movements as well as some historical events in which Appā participated ake the centre stage. They are in intimate focus. Actors, big and small, appear there as and whe the situation demands. As most of her family members and kins were her co-fighters, they come in tably into the picture. Some others (like her two sons) are mentioned in passing because the context demanded that. Thus this bunch of reminiscences is another outcome of her practice of '*anāsak i yoga*' which as mentioned earlier, she strived hard to practise. In the glare of her superb

narration one will enjoy the engrossing stories of various struggles, but at the same time one learns little or nothing as far as the story of her personal life is concerned. Thus if one describes *Amru a Anubhaba* as an autobiography, the glare is reduced to glitch.

"My childhood ended at the age of thirteen" - she recalls at the outset, in the first chapter. (Incidentally, heranother role-model Tagore said goodbye to formal education at the age of thirteen). She had her baptism of fire at the tender age of fourteen when she had her first experience of jail life. In 1932, during salt satyagrah she was sent to jail for selling "illegal salt". Ironically, in the 1990's, in the afternoon of her life, again she had togive a call for salt satyagraha. In her tract *Sabu Luna Lokankara* (All the salt belongs to the people) she envisages 'the second salt sayagraha.' Fromimperialism to neo-imperialism, the history had come full circle in her own life time. How deeply she was upset by this time warp in the cruel repetition of history, that too, in so short a time, can be well understood from the fact that after writing two tracts on this predatory politics of salt, she added as the last chapter to *Amru a Anubhaba*, a long essay on this subject.

Amru a Anubhaba is a brief survey of her participation in freedom movement, Bhoodan-Gramdan movement, Sampurna Kranti movement, her experiments in basic education, and her involvement in relief operations during famine in Kalahandi, communal riot in Rourkela and in the relief camps of the Banglādeshi refugees. There are valuable sidelights on the role of adolescents in the freedom movement, the position of women in early twentieth century Odisha and their role in freedom movement; the method of deschooling and self-teaching etc.

The first chapter entitled "Childhood Memories" gives a glimpse of some of the early influences that shaped her creative self. The artistic ambiance of the household of her maternal uncles left a deep imprint on her psyche. All the year round theirhousehold was alive with cultural activities, such as drama, opera, music soirees and carnivals. One of her maternal uncles was a popular writer, who authored a famous romance of his time, *'Malā Jahna'* (The Dead Moon). There, in her maternal uncles' home Appā learnt music from a famous vocal music teacher of her time.

On her father's side, she traces back her ancestry to Sarala Das (14thcentury) known as the founder of modern Odia langage and literature. Her maternal grandfather, Gopalaballava Das, is one of the earliest novelists of Odisha and Gopalaballava's elder brother, Madhusudan Das is considered the 'founder' of modern Odisha and a precursor of the patriotic poets. Appā's father and brother were voracious readers and prolific writers. She learnt nature-study during morning walks with her father. She did not read Indian history from text books which were written from the colonialist point of view. Her father used to write down history for her perusal. Though Appā had no formal education, the climate of liberal education prevalent in her family shaped her creative life from her childhood. In ancient India two types of graduateswere acknowledged, such as, *vidyā snā aka* (academic graduate) and *bra a snā aka* (activist graduate). Appā and her brother, devoid of formal education were activist graduates in true sense of the term.

Her creativity was honed to perfection when Malati Choudhury (néSen) joined their household as the better half of her uncle Nabakrushna Choudhury. She was direct disciple of Rabindranath Tagore in Santiniketan. An ace Veena player and vocalist, she was one of the earliest interpreter-singer of Rabindra sangeet in India. Completely soaked in the ethos of the Bengal renaissance

Malati Devi started a new discourse in the Gandhian camp. She is one of the pioneers in India who could make successful fusion of Rabindrik sensibility and aesthetics with Gandhian austerity and activism. It would not be out of place to mention that many puritans in Gandhian camp (the same might be true of the Tagorean camp as well) did not feel comfortable with such hybridization.

That Gandhi and Tagore - though held each other in high esteem - differed from each other on some fundamental issues is well known. Besides this, the conservative followers of Gandhi-Vinoba camp believed in a spartan way of life and had a distaste for 'modern' art and literature. Tilt towards Rabindrik priorities was considered by them, a kind of dalliance not expected from activists engaged in a struggle. This Gandhi-Tagore fusion was poised virtually, as a counter-discourse by a section in the mainstream Sarvoday camp. Appā's brother Manmohan has discussed this in his autobiography*Kasturi MrugaSama* which, incidentally, had also received the coveted Sarala Puraskar. The conclusion reached by Keats in his famous poem *Ode to the Gracian Urna*: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty", was an article of faith with Appā.

The early artistic influences and the liberal education she gave herself has gone a long way in shaping the creative personality of this self-taught genius. The solid foundation of commitment and creativity makes her first stroke on the canvas, a defining stroke, a model for biography writing in Odia. Thisis perhaps the only memoir/autobiography in Odia which is a match for *Atma Charita*, the autobiography of Fakir Mohan Senapati (1927). *Atma Charita* still remains the classic bench-mark for life-writing in Odia, as far as its style is concerned. Appā, like Fakir Mohan does not write, she paints. With heaps of interesting anecdotes, she narrates till she brings a fact home. To create a lively colorful image out of a simple anecdote she uses her unusual felicity with Odia words and idioms. With an eye for details she hones the event or the character till the desired iconic image emerges out of it. And like all great artists she achieves this with minimum but sure strokes, with surprising economy of words.

Like Fakir Mohan she has the rare gift of cinematic vision. As Sergei Eisenstein, the father of modern cinema and one of the pioneers of film theory reminds, cinematic vision is not necessarily limited to people associated with cinema. It is a method of cognition. Some are naturally endowed with it. When Appā animates her subject in iconic details, it glides into visual scanner. There the reader can find the event or person she describes, move and talk. Her perception of the torture inflicted on salt satyagrahis, the description of early twentieth century Cuttack city, the initiation ceremony of a prospective Jaina Sadhwi are so graphically described that nothing is left to imagination. The description of the luminous radiance of her mother's countenance reflecting the dim light of *sanjabati* (offered as a ritual of Hindu vespers) or the description of the lyrical gait of Chambal lass returning home with pitcher on her head, is pure poetry. Her description of the household of her maternal uncles and their lifestyle draws so vivid a picture of early twentieth century feudal life in Odisha that one making a film on that period can straight lift that portion from *Amru a Anubhaba* and use it as a shooting script.

As said earlier, her style like her personality is smooth flowing - never obtrusive, never ostentatious. Therefore, her form does not overshadow her content and her moralising self does not over power her empathetic eclecticism. Hence she can at times, rise easily above her

ideological stand which nevertheless, remains firm and clear. She holds the naxalites(Maoists), for whom power emanates from the barrel of the gun, in high esteem and describes Indira's 'emergency' against which her whole family fought, with utmost restraint. Even as critique, her criticism does not smack of any ill will. In the above two cases, she points out their tragic flaw with the dispassionateness of an epic dramatist. This only proves how closely she has emulated the Gandhian style of reporting which reflects the sublime spirit of tolerance for the adversities and the adversaries.

Her sense of humour and ready-wit contributes significantly to her racy style. More often than not her conversation as much as her writing was couched in humour. Humour was visceral with her. She describes even her adversities with an amused abandon. Some of the funniest descriptions of *Amruta Anubhaba* are those describing her jail life and the gory details of the Satyagrahis being tortured by police. A few examples will suffice: In the chapter entitled'Ward no.12' she describes the jail ward: "At last I got the right of admission to my long cherished sacred *tirtha* at the age of fourteen. There was a commotion as soon as we arrived there. The smell of freedom coming out of our body wafted around. The senior inmates backslapped and patted us. Then started the discussion about movement outside -Who are the new women recruits, where are they hiding, who among them will land here on 6th April, where are the bulletins being printed etc. etc. I threw a glance at our new place of residence. In 1932 there was no electricity in Cuttack jail. The room was dimly lit by kerosene lantern. There were huge doors - 8′ high and 4′ wide. There was only a single entrance. The door and the windows had thick iron railing sans wooden panel. They were wide open to rain, cold and sunlight. The room was a big cage. In one corner of that cage, a space measuring 8′X6′ separated from the main hall by a low partition was set apart. When there is lock-up, the inmates have to answer the call of nature there. An earthen pot and a tin pot were supplied for the purpose. The whole ward enjoys the fragrance of faeces and urine till the door opens in the morning. There are forty two raised earthen mounds within the ward. Each is two and half feet high, six feet long, andtwo and half feet wide. One side of it is raised to meet the function of a pillow. On each of those mounds are kept one scarf, one sari and a blanket. A white long cloth with blue stripes printed lengthwise was an apology for a sari. No mosquito nets. In those days a sayingwas making the rounds:

If one stay in Cuttack doth
May perforce put on
Only a strip of loin cloth
But I bet
One can never afford to be
Without a mosquito net.

"On the side of each mound a metal pot was placed. It looked like a tiny cauldron without handles. They had multifarious use. They are used for eating, drinking, bath, cleansing after toilet etc. etc."

"After surveying all around with our eyes and ears, with heart contented and head calmed we wrapped ourselves from head to toe and went to sleep. But alas, sleep?Sleep had taken flight. Swarms of bedbugs were all over us."[8] The description of the jail latrine: "3′long, 3′ wide and 3′ in height - tiny tin-roofed rooms. No doors. In each one, between two foot-rests is placed, in a pit, a coaltar-coated small pot. If the visitors make an exit error and, instead of coming out

simultaneously, come out at different time from those cabins, then they have to be a bit shameless. I have heard, in Vaisnab *sāstras* shamelessness is recommended for God realisation. Realisation of *Swaraj* was realisation of God for us. Never mind if one accepts this shamelessness of ours in that light."[9]Here is description of two *Satyagrahis* being tortured by police: Gokulananda Mohanty, a satyagrahi is thrashed, kicked and lambasted till the police man himself is thoroughly exhausted. When the third-degree ritual is temporarily stopped, bruised and bleeding Gokulananda crawls to the policeman and asks laughingly, "brother, can you lend me a *pān* (betel)?" Such request is usually made to a very intimate friend. Appā's father commented on this incident: "Gokulananda's bad habit of pan-chewing notwithstanding, his gesture towards that police man exemplified the conduct and attitude of an ideal satyagrahi."[10]Appā cites another case of a recruit of *bānarasenā* (literally, 'Monkey-Brigade' - the adolescent *satyagrahis* were so called). A group of 'monkey-brats' were picketing in front of a liquor shop. The police as well as the musclemen of the liquor vendor attacked the boys and started beating them. One boy, Gunanidhi by name, was so badly battered that his comrades took him to be dead. When the police ambulance (a bullock cart) was carrying him away, Binod, a comrade tensed and heavy hearted,cried out, "Gunanidhi! my Gunanidhi...!" In a whispering tone Gunanidhi mumbled,"don't worry. I am alive."[11]*Amru a Anubhaba* is full of such humorous anecdotes. She has this uncanny talent for turning grief into an occasion for giggle. Those who know her intimately know the irreparable losses she suffered in her personal and public life. But she never gave in. While describing her jail life in the second chapter of *Amru a Anubhaba* she notes how she, along with her satyagrahi co-prisnors made conscious effort never to feel defeated. "xxxx Their(the authority's) main aim was to completely paralyse our mind. We knew if we become victim of our opponents' tactics we would be defeating ourselves on our own."[12] So when the prisoners felt let down they were reminded of the advice given by Gopabandhu Choudhury and Acharya Harihara. "The way to save oneself from the monotony of jail life, and from the resulting depression and restlessness" they advised, "is to increase ones spiritual strength and tap the perennial sources of joy inside one's own self."[13] She used this talisman for the rest of her life. Even in her gossip she used to cover up the Stygian darkness of her pain and sufferings with sparkling humour. Her side-splitting humour draws tears in one's eyes. But the next moment, one is at loss to realise whether it was a tear of joy or grief! Whatever it may be, it is thoroughly cathartic in effect. Ultimately it purges, purifies and inspires the listener.

Needless to say, one notices in her humour a marked departure from the usual stuff. Being a true votary of *ahimsā*, her humour is devoid of acidic satire, sarcasm and mockery. It is always witty but innocent. It tickles but does not hurt. Only a heart which has no bitterness towards anything or anybody, no ill-will, no scores to settle can be a source of such humour.

In *Amru a Anubhaba* there are moments of philosophical reflections on life and society.At times she is self-critical. She expresses her inner conflict between *bhakti* (devotion) and *jnana* (knowledge). Like the two birds of *the Vedas* or like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in Auden's *The Dyer's Hand*, she sometimes feels her ego confronting herself. She fears she might have committed mistakes and might have been victim of her pride because her actions were "prompted by mere devotion, devotion devoid of knowledge." In those moments of confusion she recommends to herself "*sādhanā* for the purification of heart, more vigorous action towards social change, and God's grace".[14]

Her philosophical loud thinking is edifying but never preachy. She followed faithfully the dictum laid down by her guru Gandhiji, "A rose does not preach. Its fragrance is its own message". Like Marx's silkworm producing silk, she produced literature not for the much touted purpose of elevating the society. It was just an activity of her nature. Yet the discerning reader of Appā never misses the sublimity in the silk nor the message in the fragrance. Like the whisper of Nature, her message in the subtext is loud and clear for one who wants to listen in.

Amru a Anubhaba covers the period 1931-1976. Her memory outlived her memoir by thirty six years. Borrowing those famous words of Quentin Crisp, one can say that her memoir is"an obituary in serial form with the last installment missing." Her vibrance, dynamism and the missionary zeal remained as fresh at the age of 90 as it was at the age of 14. She devoted the last part of her life to revamping the institution at Gopalabadi in far-off Raygada district where thanks to her effort a high school for tribal girls could be constructed. She was moving 1,000 kilometres up and down, religiously almost every month for a decade till she became completely bed ridden in 2010. Let us wait for a Boswell who will record the experiences of her last 37 years.

For an anthology this author compiled in 1989, Appā contributed a write-up (of course, anonymously) with the title "*Deepa (lamp) Laxmi*". The brass statuette of Laxmi, the goddess of prosperity with *deepa* on her head and hands are found in *pujā* room of many Hindu houses. Appā used the metaphor of *Deepa Laxmi* for the lady Sarvoday activists working in far off hilly tracts of Odisha. These ill-paid brave ladies were trying like Laxmi to bring prosperity and light into the huts of downtrodden, while themselves burning like wick in a lamp. Appā's own life very much fits into that image - the symbol of empathy and altruism.

'*Kabi*', translated loosely as 'poet', has a very wide connotation in ancient literature of India. From a poet to a physician, anybody having ability 'to feel into',i.e. to empathise, was addressed as *Kabi*. A *kabi*'s empathy was *ekā mabodha* - complete identity of 'I' with the 'Other', a far deeper kind of empathy than Einfühlung of Theoder Lipps or *anmayee bhāvanā* of the ancient Indian rhetoricians. The empathy they talk about was cognitive and psychological. *Ekā mabodha* is deeply affective and moral.The popular story as to how *rishi* Valmeeki became the*ādi Kabi* (first among the poets) exemplifies the kind of profound *ekā mabodha* which welds ethics of empathy with aesthetics of empathy. A crane while engrossed in foreplay with its lady love was killed by the arrow of a hunter. The bereaved female crane hovered round the dead body of herlover making heart-rending moan. That pathetic sight and sound moved Valmeeki, who was just coming out of the river after finishing his morning ablution. In a reflex, a sanskrit*sloka* popped out of Valmeeki's lips. Valmeeki had a pleasant surprise. It was a 'eureka' effect which made both Valmeeki and the world conscious that the first '*sloka*' of the world is born. Thenceforth, Valmiki came to be known as *ādi Kabi*.

The message that this story carries is crystal clear. An art-object of highest order emerges out of empathy. Of course, it also makes it clear that an artist of epic height is simultaneously a *rishi* and a *Kabi*. She/he must have the capacity to contain and feel the emotion of the 'Other' and at the same time must have the ability to sublimate and transform that emotion into an aesthetic one. In other words, to borrow a *Vedic* phrase,he or she must be a '*Kabirmanishi*' (a saint and a poet). Annapurnā Mahāranā belonged to that rare and vanishing species of *Kabirmanishi*.

Notes and References

[1] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 1978 (1954), Moscow, Progress Publishers, p.29
[2]A.Maharana, *Amru a Anubhaba*, 2009 (2005), Siksa Sandhana, Bhubaneswar, p.449
[3] Ibid., p.484
[4] Marx Engels, *On Literature and Art*, 1978 (1976), Moscow, Progress Publishers, p.144
[5] *Bhagabat Gita*, Chap. xii, verse 15
[6] *Amruta Anubhaba*, pp.305-306
[7] *Amruta Anubhaba* (Sacred Memories) is Appā's memoir in Odia (Literally translated, the title's sanskrit phrase reads, "nectar of experiences"). In fact the book is a collection of reminiscences. In the 1970's it was serialised in *Sucharitā*, an Odia Women's magazine, which soon after stopped publication. Prafulla Kumar Behera, then the editor of *Sikhā*, an educational journal published by Siksa Sandhana of Bhubaneswar got interested in putting the reminiscences together in a book form. Being encouraged by his publisher Anil Pradhan, he tried to collect all instalments from the editor of the said magazine. But neither the editor, nor the author herself could help. So Behera along with Pitambara Sankhua and Loknath Panda made a wild goose chase for them in the shops peddling old journals on the pavements of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. Fortunately, they could collect almost all relevant copies of the said journal from pavements. With few copies collected from Chandrasekhar Mahapatra, the father-in-law of her younger son, the collection was complete. As the author mentions elsewhere, the book covers the period 1931-1976. The instalments took book *avatar* after lying scattered for 25 years.
[8] *Amruta Anubhaba*, pp. 86-87
[9] Ibid., p.89
[10] Ibid., p.203-204
[11] Ibid., p.163
[12] Ibid., p.122
[13] Ibid., p.125
[14] Ibid., p.223



Basic Education

by

Anadi Charan Naik

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Shri Anadi Naik is a committed Gandhian and Sarvoday activist. He had undergone education at Vani-Shree, the basic education center in Ramachandrapur where Sarat Chandra Maharana and Annapurna Maharana worked and lived after independence. Anadi Bhai, as he is fondly addressed, joined the Bhoodan movement instead of taking up a secured salaried job although came came from an economically weak background. He worked in Bhoodan-Gramdan movement in Koraput district, Odisha. He has the distinction of going on Padayatra (foot march) throughout the length and breadth of Odisha as a companion of Acharya Harihar Dash. In his career as a nonviolent revolutionary he participated in several actions including the Sampoorna Kranti movement of Jaya Prakash Narayan. He was imprisoned as MISA detainee, without trial, when he opposed proclaimation of emergency in 1975. Now he lives in USA and is very active in socio-economic issues. Anadi Bhai assesses rise and fall of the Basic Education from his perspectives and his experiences.

Basic Education

Anadi Charan Naik

Search for a new way to educate the young:

Many concerned nationalists, while engaged in the struggle for freedom, saw that the British system of education in India was causing more harm than good. The British could not keep an entire subcontinent inhabited by tens of millions of civilized people under control. So they had to create a method that would strengthen and help continue their rule. In order to collect taxes, manage various administrative works and run economic activities they needed trusted employees who spoke their language and were willing to carry out their orders faithfully.

The British had control of India in a geographical way. But without capturing the minds of a large section of the Indian population they could still be on a shaky ground. Therefore, bringing a drastic change into the existing education system by Anglicizing it was a necessity. Enslavement at a mental level was subtle yet more effective.

Every invading power throughout history has imposed its own culture and education on the conquered people. In that sense the British did not act differently in India. Looking at the postcolonial world of Africa, Latin America and Asia today, one sees the colonial system of education was used everywhere to strengthen a mindset among the natives in favor of colonial rule. Colonial powers, In the name of bringing new ideas and new identity into their colonies, invariably kept an upper hand. They tried to "civilize" the natives. In British India those who passed through the British education system became a privileged lot. They got government jobs with a steady salary and many patronages.

Within India's feudal system, at the time, the land owning class lived comfortably. Those who did menial jobs were hand to mouth all of the time. Business was confined to selling products from one village to another. Towns were few and far between. In a way, traders were rarely better off than their neighbors. The caste system had defined everyone's role within the society. Because the system gave a lot of privilege to a handful of people, the privileged ones thought that they were more important than others and behaved that way. Over the years, the system had been quite crystalized. The British took full advantage of the situation. They picked up and trained in their way the people from the upper echelon of society. The British needed faithful, local employees to swerve public opinion in their favor and they found good targets.

By the time of their arrival, a dispirited land had lost its shine through various internal conflicts and corrosions. By the time the empire spread its wings, some Indians enjoyed a lavish life style at the expense of the rest. The very poor of the society were left to be exploited in every possible way. There was hardly a middle class worth the name. The British very shrewdly co-opted the privileged ones and through them tried to consolidate power. The privileged Indians, blessed by British protection, found a nice way to enjoy life without doing hard work. It was the weakness of the existing Indian society at large that the British found useful. So they took advantage of it.

They had to collect taxes - first for the shareholders of the East India Company; then for Britain's public exchequer. In order to collect taxes regularly without a problem they also created a landowning class. The British auctioned off properties owned by those whom they defeated in wars and conflicts. Those who purchased those properties at auction were basically opportunists acting as stooges in the hands of the new rulers. In a typical divide and rule method the British made some people in India newly wealthy while ruining others financially. The new friends of the British Raj wholeheartedly accepted the British system of education. In order to enlighten the Indian subcontinent with the full backing of the British system, many of them opened new schools, colleges and universities. The process continued for years.

In the history of liberation struggles, Mahatma Gandhi's call to boycott all things British was a revolutionary idea. Over the years, the people of India had been content to follow the direction of the British who had instilled in them an inferiority complex. Consumer goods were being imported from Great Britain whereas local artisans in tens of thousands of villages in India were losing their occupations. It was the British aristocracy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that was benefiting from all the exploits of the colonies whereas the streets of London were filling with people of Dickensian poverty.

In order to liberate the Indian mind from the superiority of the British education system Gandhiji asked the nation to boycott it. Hundreds and thousands gave up schools and colleges and became freedom fighters. India's nonviolent struggle for freedom continued for nearly 30 years. But a free nation has to have schools and colleges. Many were thinking: What kind of education would India have after the British left?

A committee was formed to find a way. Dr. Zakir Hussain, an educationist and a future President of India was its chairman and Sriman Narayan, a future Governor and ambassador and a leading public figure in free India was its secretary. The Hussain Committee produced the blue prints for the system of primary and secondary education in free India and named it Basic Education. The focus of this system of education was to create generations of Indians who would be free thinkers and creative. Educated in their own languages they will not back away from building things with their own hands. It would be a perfect antidote to the prevailing attitude in the country where getting a white collar job in the government bureaucracy was the final destination of any educational training. A consumptive attitude was being respected whereas work itself was being looked down upon.

However, a free country needed workers to build and create things with a "can do" mentality. The process had to start very early in the life of a child. India was not free. Yet, the population had to be ready for it.

Educating India's children in basics such as science and arithmetic was a no brainer. But more importantly, they had to be taught values that respected physical work. What can be a better way than letting them practice at school?

Basic Education was very much geared toward India's villages. More than eighty percent of the people lived there. Yet, the villages suffered all kinds of depravity. In Basic schools around the country - wherever it was experimented - young children learned to grow vegetables and cotton in

the school yards. By doing so they learned to respect labor. By growing plants in the field they also learned various aspects of botany. Throughout the country, there were not very many schools. In order to attend a 6th or 7th grade in a middle school, a student sometimes had to walk 5 to 7 miles each way. Therefore, it was absolutely necessary to bring education to the villages and teach the children all the basics in their own language. Schools run by the government taught English from the fourth grade. The teachers were not well qualified to teach English beyond a few ill pronounced nouns and verbs. The students were equally at loss to master the language. Taken together, it was a grand waste of time and effort.

In the English medium Government schools children in those days were learning the history of Great Britain. They were memorizing the works and achievements of various Viceroys in India. Now they had to learn about local heroes and the exploitation of the British Empire. In order to reach out to the maximum number of children, it was necessary to teach them in their own language

Over the years, the colonial power had created divisions at all levels. Those who held white color jobs under the Government were considered to be respected people and those who did menial jobs were looked down upon. That kind of mindset was not conducive to building a society based on equality. First of all, education being available in a very limited way, those who were educated enjoyed the lion's share of privileges at all levels. They owned land. They had money and they were respected in society. It was necessary to demolish that arrangement. That is why the very first thing that was being taught at basic schools was the respect for labor, any kind of labor. In Hind Swaraj Gandhiji had already said that the work of a barber and the work of a lawyer have the same price.

There was no shortage of social grading in feudal India in those days. At the lowest step of the society, those who cleaned toilets were looked down upon contemptuously. Yet, this was a job that was absolutely necessary for the functioning health of towns and cities. Nobody took into consideration the job itself. Yet, those who performed this job were pushed down to the bottom of the society and more often than not were branded "untouchables". In order to change that mindset the children at Basic schools cleaned toilets at school and made composts. Tens of millions people both in cities and villages used open fields as latrines. Not only did these open latrines help spread diseases by polluting waters and spreading germs, they also wasted millions of tons of compost that could be used to grow better plants. Digging a hole in the ground is simple work. But it requires awareness. The children at a very early age learned the relationship between health, ecology, nutrition for plants and cleanliness.

Then there was the caste system. In villages this system was very strong. It was intrusive as well as oppressive. Gandhiji and his followers were dead against the caste system. Cleaning human waste was the work for the person from the lowest caste. When children from upper castes did this job they basically learned to get rid of the caste system. And they did.

Basic Education was created to bring changes into Indian society. There were certain values that were deeply rooted in the minds of the people that needed to be uprooted. From a very early age children were taught to be self-sufficient not only in growing food but making clothes. Food and clothing were two fundamental needs that affect everyone. At Basic schools children were taught

to grow vegetables and fruits. They were also taught to make their own clothing. As a first step they were taught to spin threads. They used Charkha or a spinning wheel to make fine threads. Students from the sixth to eighth grades were taught the weaving of clothes with handspun threads.

There was another aspect to it also. The foundation for Basic Education was laid when India was still struggling to be free. India was buying all of its manufactured goods from Great Britain. Clothing was one of the most prominent and easily visible one. In those days there were not too many native industries. By asking to boycott British goods, Gandhiji encouraged Indians to make their own clothes. As a corollary to boycotts, the homemade khadi became a powerful instrument. It was a simple act that anyone, even ten year old school children could do. Multiplied thousands of times, British were unable to sell crores of rupees worth of clothes in India. In Basic Schools children spun and weaved their own clothes. They were proud to wear them. By wearing the khadi they automatically defied the Raj and became freedom fighters by proxy. It was hoped that these children, freedom fighters, would grow up to influence the Indian society at various levels.

As a new method of education, Basic Education became a powerful tool for social change. Those who were involved in teaching within this new system were die hard freedom fighters, followers of Mahatma Gandhi. They were opposed to the British rule in India and were actively involved in doing whatever they could do to topple the Raj. In a way they were the "change" that they wanted to achieve. Their lifestyle was unlike those of their neighbors. These teachers wore the handspun Dhoti and did not wear any shirt. The dhoti and chaddar were their regular clothes.

Naturally, their students became influenced by them. Instead of learning the achievements of the British monarchs the children studied about leaders like D' Valera, Lenin and Gandhi. They sang and recited nationalistic songs and poems. During 1942 when Gandhiji called for "do or die" some of these students became fighters and participated in nonviolent noncooperation.

In Odisha, Bari was the epicenter of the freedom movement. Basic Education also started from there. Several young students like Indramani Jena and Brajabandhu Khuntia were taken to jail. Another student Suprabhat Dey, 11 years old, lost a part of his earlobe when a stray bullet fired by British soldiers hit him. Every one of the teachers at the Basic school went to jail in 1942.

Basic Education was India-centric and wanted to change India. The very first step to do so was to get rid of the British rule. Both the students and their teachers were anxious to get that done.

In those days the entire country was obsessed with fear. Without helping to get rid of such a feeling, nothing could change. Therefore, energizing the masses was priority number one.

In every family, education for girls was considered a secondary thing. Parents were interested in sending their boys to school if they could afford it. Other than a handful of rich families, ordinary villagers did not care about the education of their daughters. On a broader scale Gandhiji wanted the women folk of India to participate in the struggle for freedom. He put emphasis not only on their education but on their political awareness. He wanted them to fight alongside their brothers and cousins and husbands. In order to form a new generation of patriotic women in India, girls had to be educated. Basic Education also gave priority to the education of girls. However, sending

girls outside the home after they reached puberty was not accepted. It required more work at the social and societal level. Yet many of those girls who were taught in Basic Education had a different outlook from their sisters or cousins educated in the conventional schools. Like boys, they too cleaned toilets and worked in the field to grow vegetables such as tomato, cabbage, cauliflower and okra. It was unheard of among villagers that girls from the upper castes were working in the field like their counterparts in the lower castes. Yet they were doing exactly that. By working in the field they were bringing change into their immediate area, family and village. In a sense these girls were making a very strong statement against prevailing values of the society.

By studying at a Basic school, girls were not wearing any kind of ornament. In those days, well off families were showing off their wealth and affection by loading their daughters with all kind of bangles, chains and earrings made of gold and silver. Unfortunately, decades after Independence, a new trend seems to have returned to the country where many working women and female college students are wearing expensive jewelry and fancy clothes. It could be the sign of a process where well off people with a feudal mindset are reverting back to the old days. During the struggle for freedom women gave up wearing ornaments which was considered to be a sign of bondage. The girls at Basic schools were trained to stay away from such things. They were being encouraged to make their own simple khadi saris and not wear any ornament. A bangle or a ring was the symbol of bondage for a girl – they learned.

From a very early age the girls at Basic schools were being taught about equality. For many years, women seemed to have existed as appendages to their menfolk. That situation had to change. The women in general and girls in particular had to learn to assert themselves. In order to build a new country with new mindset the power of women had to be released in full. In that sense the schooling at the Basic system performed a miracle.

Those who were at the bottom of the economic ladder in the village were able to send their daughters to school where they not only learned how to read and write but also to think about their own conditions - economic and social. Years later when the Bhoodan movement started in free India many of them participated in it. The realisation that they had in their formative years at a Basic school had taught them about their own condition. In the name of caste, some of them were pushed down into the lowest level. They wanted a way out. But the society itself was stacked against them, so they had to find a creative and nonviolent way to liberate themselves which they eventually did on their own terms. That is later.

First and foremost Basic Education was village centric and India centric. Rural development, by educating millions of young minds that had no chance of getting into a college, was its primary goal.

India was the combination of thousands of large and small villages. The people there were the backbone of the entire nation. Without helping the villages grow strong, not very much could be achieved. With this conviction in heart, the planners of Basic Education set out to work. They had a hard task before them. But it had to be done.

India was a colony. Yet, the goal of any education system within the country had to work toward Independence. The education had to have a nationalistic character. In that sense Basic Education provided both. Children from a very tender age learned to salute the national flag, sung national songs and by weaving and wearing khadi clothes helped the struggle for freedom. After Independence some of these young men made valuable contributions toward India's development.

As students of Basic Education the children became the change that they were striving for. For example, in India everything was determined by one's caste. By ignoring such nonsense the boys and girls of Basic Education brought new awareness into their families. Their parents, grandparents or other relatives may have practiced the hierarchy of the caste system. But for those boys and girls, products of the new education system, there was no such thing. In its time, such an idea was revolutionary which touched the roots of all the social evils India had. Through communal prayer, communal dining and communal living the children became an agent of change for the present and for the future. They adhered to a new life style and upheld new values. As future citizens of a free India they also promoted a very different culture. They were taught to live unpretentiously and simply. Yet their thinking would encompass the whole world. "Plain living and high thinking" was their motto.

From the very beginning, Basic Education was village centric. Uplifting the villages at all levels was its main goal. The villages lacked proper schools. And whatever kind of school was there, it was in a dilapidated condition. So, the learning institution and the local villagers had to be connected. The children in the villages came from poor families. Many of the families depended on the work their children did. For example a nine or ten year old could graze cows and goats. A twelve year old girl could collect fire wood or draw water from the river for cooking. While the parents remained at work the children could manage small errands. Taking care of younger siblings was the common task for the girls. On the whole, education was being seen not as an absolute necessity but as a dispensable luxury. Given the prevailing mindset at the time such neglect for education could be expected.

By spreading Basic Education in villages, its supporters tried to introduce a comprehensive change into the rural life that was rife with all kinds of divisions. Gandhiji's dream was to build an equalitarian society in free India. To that end, the new educational system and the government were to work together. At the present, the system was producing Government servants who considered themselves as elite. Their elitist mentality was serving the British Government well. But it was hurting the people. Therefore, the new system of education had to identify itself with villagers. While trying to bring about change in the larger society it had to promote their trade, their agriculture and their way of life.

Working with hands or menial labor had to gain respect. India's education system so far was to train people who did not have to work with their hands. With servants to serve them hand and foot they, the educated elite, had become a pampered lot. Some actually were and others were trying to be.

Education being limited to the people from the upper caste and well to do families, there was a naturally built in complex of superiority among the educated people of India. Their mindset was opposed to what Gandhiji wanted and the country needed. *'Sā vidyā jā bimuktaye'* was the

meaning of the education. Yet, a slavish mind had taken over the entire country. The most intelligent and the most 'enlightened" had become the tools in the hands of the British. By depending on their skill and ingenuity the Raj was becoming richer and more powerful. A feeling of gratitude also prevailed among the educated of India who felt that the "British have enlightened the countryside." Because of the British, the country got the English education, rail ways, postal and telegraph services and a system of cohesive government run by a strong bureaucracy." In their view "the British rule at long last was able to unite a fragmented nation called India." The British had very shrewdly put in the text books that it was they who stopped the Sati system and child marriage in India. This sense of gratitude for the British Raj was the most dangerous thing and needed to go.

By perpetuating a feeling of inferiority complex, the prevailing system of education had ruined the minds of the young. Not only had it diminished the value of their own minds, it had stunted the growth and development of independent thinking. Anything that came against the interest of the Raj had to be eliminated. Therefore, no teacher could analyze the exploitation done by the British in India and keep his job in the system. In the same way no teacher was allowed to support a nationalist movement. The teachers could in a normal atmosphere pass on their conviction or the lack of it to their pupils. However, citizens for the most part remained oblivious to the general decay in the country and in the educational system in particular.

Gandhiji's call to boycott the British educational system in a way saved the country and helped clear its conscience. His call drew attention to the need of an education system with a nationalistic bend. It also forced educationists engaged in the struggle for freedom to look at the rural areas with a fresh eye. The need to spread education into these areas had to be looked at seriously. Basic Education raised a new hope in that it provided tools to educate the young and not so young at the same time. By rejecting many of the strongly held values it showed boldness of spirit. At the same time it also brought in new values. In many ways the establishment of new values with the rejection of old ones turned out to be revolutionary. However, this revolution was bloodless, subtle and did no harm to anyone. It was a kind of "transvaluation of values" within the society.

Towering figures like Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Bal Gangadhar Tilak had done a lot for higher education in India. But to use the education system to train young minds against the Raj was a pure Gandhian method.

The country was still struggling for freedom. No matter what its people did, gaining independence was the supreme need of the day. In the Gandhian method of fighting, a struggle against the Raj could be fought by any one, rich or poor, old or young, woman or man. Through their participation in the movement for Independence both teachers and students of Basic Education became a threat to the regime. They also put the government in a box.

In order to show its good intention, the Government had opened primary schools in a handful of villages in each district. Therefore, it could not oppose any such institution trying to spread literacy by schooling the children in villages.

In free India

At the beginning, the Basic Education system remained in a conceptual stage while educationists like Kaka Kalelkar along with E.W. Aryanayakam and his wife Asha Devi worked on finding an alternative system in the Gandhian line. Like Sriman Narayan and Zakir Hussain Aryanayakam also had studied abroad – Narayan and Aryanayakam in the UK and Hussain in Germany. They had seen firsthand the effect of education in the West.

In free India, in order for this new system to be effective it had to be accepted by the government because those who came out of this system had to be recognized by other systems as well. For example, a child after completing 5th grade should have the eligibility to enter the 6th grade no matter where he or she went to school. That can only be done by establishing a network of schools. Throughout India in many areas, independence minded educationists had established new schools. These schools were enough to meet the need of a specific area. But there was no network for mutual recognition. They were also few and far between.

Everybody knew that any change in the educational system was predicated on the arrival of independence in India. Whatever concept the educationists had was to wait until that time. In Gandhiji's ashram in Sevagram near Wardha, Maharashtra they started the experiment. Yet, the real focus was on overthrowing the Raj from India. India at that time comprised of an area encompassing from Dhaka to Peshawar through Kolkata, New Delhi and Mumbai. Its population was nearly 400 million or 40 crores. A very small section of the population was actively opposed to the British Government whereas many did not care or were quite complacent. Those who were a part of the nonviolent noncooperation had no idea as to when, if ever, the British were actually going to leave India.

History was playing its own tricks. The Bolshevik movement of Soviet Russia had brought a new sense of egalitarianism throughout the world. In India itself, many of the educated people were thinking in the Russian line. The success of the peasants there had emboldened many within the freedom movement in India. For them, the Soviet system was a liberator. In spreading education among the poor villagers and among the underclass in general they were willing to accept the Russian model which was an anathema to the British rule.

By the 1930s another specter of war was looming over Europe. The British were anxious and wanted peace in their colony in the subcontinent. India was the jewel in the crown and they did not want it to be disturbed. Yet, disturbed it was. A desire for autonomy was growing within India and the British could no longer ignore it. So they granted limited self-rule to India's citizens. As a result an election was held in the British occupied States of India. Newly formed governments in those states, under the British rule, took charge of education at the primary and secondary levels.

Odisha was one of the states where the Indian National Congress came to power. Under the new government the concept of Basic Education gained ground. In those days, Ravenshaw College at Cuttack was the only college in the entire state. Each district headquarter along with a few principalities boasted a high school. Primary schools were established closer to the homes of local zamindars. The primary schools were up to the 3rd grade. Beyond that, there was no education in

the village. The children who wanted to attend a school had to go to a Middle school crossing streams and rivers miles away from home. Now the government had to bring education to areas where going to school was a dream.

Odisha became a fertile ground for Basic Education. In the new system the educating of children became a part of the efforts made for rural development. In order to understand the history of Basic Education in general and its development and demise in Odisha in particular, one has to delve deeply into the recent history of the state.

In 1934 Mahatma Gandhi visited Odisha and conducted his famous Harijan Padayatra. In order to prepare the country for the arrival of Independence he needed a cadre of dedicated activists to remain engaged in changing the minds of the masses. These workers needed to continue different kinds of constructive activities among the villagers that included eradication of untouchability, better animal husbandry, wearing of the khadi,et cetera. Without getting involved in the politics of power these activists were to be the conscience of the masses. They were to be rooted in their villages.

Gandhiji's idea of going into a village and trying to change the minds of the masses touched the heart of Gopabandhu Choudhury who was by then one of the leading figures within the freedom movement in Odisha. Not yet 40 years old, he had amassed by then a string of achievements. As a young aristocrat, he had earned one of the highest ranking Government jobs opened to Indians in the Civil Service. Yet, he quit his job to participate in the freedom movement. In 1930, he led a group of friends to prepare salt – an act of defiance against the British rule. When Gandhiji visited Odisha he and his wife Rama Devi were in charge of the arrangements. Rama Devi, through her hard work and fearlessness so impressed Gandhiji that while writing about his Odisha experience in Harijan, Gandhiji wrote about her profusely. Gandhiji's mission was to energize the villages of India by eradicating untouchability. To that end he advised his followers to go to villages and work among the villagers so that the people in villages would be ready to accept freedom when it came.

The villages at the time suffered from many ills and casteism was only one of them. For the most part, people had become dependent and lacked self-confidence and took no initiative to make any change. A sense of fear prevailed everywhere. Gandhiji asked his followers to work really hard to make fearless out of a fearful population. In order to do so the workers themselves must go into their midst and plant the seeds of fearlessness. Gopabandhu Choudhury and Rama Devi were devoted followers of Gandhiji. They unhesitatingly responded to his call and settled in a village called Bari. For many years they carried on many experiments for rural development there and the experiment in Basic Education was one of them.

Why did the Choudhuries choose Bari?

Gopabandhu Choudhury was familiar with the area. Several years earlier he had been to Bari as a relief officer after a severe flood. At the time, looking at the pathetic situation around him, he believed that the Government did not do enough to protect villagers and in a written report he said that. His superiors asked him to change the content and make the report favorable to the government. He declined to do so and the incident encouraged him to quit employment in the

Government. Besides, Bari was an extremely remote area. Situated between the Brahmani and Kharasrota rivers it was prone to annual floods. Far away from any big city, the area had no discernible road or government school. Yet, all the social divisions and feudal shortcomings ruled there. Basically the people were poor. There were a couple of zamindars in the village who collected taxes from the local people and supported the British government as its stooges. Unlike many other villages Bari had a sizable number of Muslim families. Of course, it had "untouchable families" who performed various trades such as basket weaving, fishing and cleaning dead cattle. Rama Devi had a distant cousin who was married into a family there.

In 1934 the Choudhuries put up their tent in Bari. Along with their two biological children Manmohan and Annapurna, three other teenagers also followed them. From day one Rama Devi went into nearby villages. Her very presence was awe inspiring. The daughter of a top Government officer Gopalballabh Das and the niece of revered Madhusudan Das, she was married into a very aristocratic family. Her father- in- law Gokulananda Choudhury was a famous lawyer. She also had other relatives who were zamindars and rich. With that kind of background she chose to work in a village like Bari. This in itself was a challenge for many. They may not have understood the nature of the struggle or where the struggle was leading them. But a suggestion coming from Rama Devi could not be wrong – they were sure about it. She won their hearts.

Sending a young girl away from home to live and work with nonrelatives was unheard of in those days. Yet the parents had no problem trusting Rama Devi. In a short time, she collected a handful of young girls to live in the ashram so that they could reach out to other women in the villages nearby. The girls did not have much education. So they were taught literature and social science. Eventually each of them went to a nearby neighborhood and taught basic skills to women and girls.

The young activists made their own clothes by spinning them from locally grown cotton and lived simply. Local people gave them food to eat and a room in which to stay. In return the young women trained by Rama Devi became a pillar of change in their respective villages where they taught the women how to spin, how to read and write, how to feed the children proper nutritious food etc. The young activists taught the village women to become assertive and give up some of the bad habits like chewing pan. In a roundabout way, they infused fearlessness among village women whom nobody so far had taken very seriously.

In 1942 India had its final push for freedom known as the "Quit India" movement. Tens of thousands people courted arrest and the whole country became inflamed with the cry for freedom. Because of all the preliminary work done in Bari and its surrounding villages, the area became one of the most important areas in Odisha. Villagers refused to pay taxes; they burned down a shop that sold British clothes and destroyed a government post office by setting it on fire. When a handful of British soldiers arrived in the area by a wooden boat they found hundreds of men standing on the embankment. They were onlookers and unarmed. Yet the British misunderstood their intent and opened fire. Four civilians were killed.

During the "Quit India" movement all of the activists connected with the Choudhuries went to jail. Their work place built of mud and bamboo and known as the House of service or "SEVA

GHARA" was demolished by the police. In order to express their defiance against the Raj, scores of women went to jail. Because of the infusion of new life and new ideas into the villages in and around Bari the area became famous in the battle against the British.

Six years ago, in 1936 a new government had taken shape in Odisha. One of its ministers was Nityananda Kanungo, a cousin of Rama Devi. One of the kingmakers in the Government was Nabakrushna Choudhury, the younger brother of Gopabandhu Choudhury. Besides them, the Choudhuries had other friends and relatives within the government. An election was held. But the ballot or the voting right was available only to property owners, those who paid a certain amount of taxes. A vast majority of people had no property to their name. So they were barred from voting. Those who were land owners and zamindars were eligible to cast votes. That is how many of the Choudhury relatives became elected. By then many from the upper echelon of the educated India were ready to kick the British out of India and these relatives of the Choudhuries were no exception.

Gopabandhu Choudhury's position within the freedom movement in Odisha was very high. Not only was he a highly educated man, he had quit a very high ranking job in the government. Among the young and youthful freedom fighters he was one of the older men, a father figure. In that capacity he could take to task anybody within the government. He was the most powerful man in the public life of Odisha- revered as well as feared. Because of his devotion to public life and the personal sacrifice he had made he could demand diligence and sacrifice from others. For him Basic Education was a necessity for villages especially for the Bari area.

Right after the new Government came to power in 1936 a middle school was granted to Bari. It had classes up to the 7th grade. Students from villages five miles away walked to study there. Some of them came from the other side of the Brahmani river. Quite a few had to cross several streams to reach school. In the monsoon those students usually stayed in the "hostel" which consisted of a kitchen at one end of the school building. The students slept in the classroom. The idea of a Basic school in the area came into existence.

Since children had to learn agriculture and other related subjects the school needed land and a building. There was a piece of fallow land by the bank of the Brahmani owned by a zamindar that lived in Cuttack. He donated the land for the school. Several villagers also donated land. Thus a school to experiment with a new education system started in the Bari area. The exact location was called Ramachandra Pur. The institution was named Banishree.

At the time there were no teachers who could teach the method of Basic Education. Yet, it was the policy of the new government to spread and strengthen such an educational system. The Government of Odisha deputed a group of seven middle level educationists to be trained in Basic Education. One of them was Sarat Chandra Maharana. Annapurna Choudhury, daughter of Rama Devi and Gopabanhu Choudhury was selected from among the public as the eighth member. She was the only one in the group who had the experience of working among women and children. She had been teaching them in the Arangabad village how to read and write and use a spinning wheel. The group was sent to Sevagram, Gandhiji's ashram, to be trained in the new method of teaching.

After completing their training Sarat Chandra Maharana and Annapurna Choudhury returned to Bari. By then they had known each other well enough and the Choudhuries were now happy to have Sarat as their son in law. He was a slightly built man who gave the impression of being shy and unsure. But he had an eye for details and was meticulous at keeping records. Inside himself. he was as strong as steel. As a young man Sarat Chandra Maharana wanted to be a doctor. While studying in Patna he became ill and had to abandon the study of medicine. He received his Bachelor's Degree with Honours in Mathematics and proceeded to get M.Ed., being the first person from Orissa to receive Master of Education (then a part of Bihar state). After getting his MA he became an officer in the Education Department in the Government of Odisha. He had volunteered for the new education system.

The Choudhuries may not have known Sarat Chandra Maharana up to this moment. But his father Chandramohan Maharana was an author and an educationist and the legendary head master at the Collegiate School at Cuttack. He had been the teacher of a host of legendary figures of Odisha including Gopabandhu Choudhury and Subhas Chandra Bose.

Given his commitment to education, Sarat Chandra Maharana seemed to be the right person to help organize the new Basic Education in Odisha. It was also a time for the struggle for freedom where the desire to make the country free trumped every other interest including the spread of education and literacy. While supportive at the beginning, the British Government opposed the education system on the ground that the educators were too "political". While the preparation for the school was going on at Ramachandra Pur, on the bank of the Brahmani, , the 1942 movement was heating up. The Congress led Government in Odisha had resigned. Both Sarat Chandra Maharana and his wife Annapurna Maharana participated in the 1942 movement and were sent to jail. When they returned in 1945 everything had to be started a new.

Thanks to the tireless work done by tens of thousands of freedom fighters, the British left India and the country gained its freedom in 1947. The members of the Congress Party came to power and in Odisha Basic Education stood ready to provide a strong alternative. The country seemed to be receptive to accept change. Basic Education, for many, became a harbinger of change.

The first group of ministers in Odisha government, after Independence, included Nabakrushna Choudhury and Rajkrushna Bose. Both men were friends from their college days and had been in the freedom movement since 1921. They were for Basic Education and did everything to encourage this educational system. As a result Basic schools at the primary level sprang up in many areas. Bari, Angul, Raj Sunakhala and Tudigadia became centers of this education. The teachers at Basic schools were former freedom fighters. They had little patience for the bureaucratic dilly dally of Government officers. While performing the teachers' job, they could take their complaints directly to any of the ministers in the Government. The officers in the Education Department did not take their actions kindly.

Gopabandhu Choudhury was never comfortable with getting involved in the government. He was even dissuading local people at Bari not to get involved in Co-operative Banks and Co-operative Stores even if the State government was actively promoting them. Because money was being handed out, one office bearer of a Co-operative Store in Bari did accept the funds but he could not provide details of the account. As a result he had to serve time. Gopabandhu Choudhury's

warnings seemed to be prophetic. He was in favor of the initiative from among the people. Out of this belief, a nongovernmental organisation was formed to spread the new type of education. It was called *Moulika Siksha Parishad* or the Basic Education Trust. Its chairman was Acharya Harihar Das, a pioneer in the field of education in Odisha. The secretary of the organisation was Sarat Chandra Maharana.

The Basic school in Ramachandra Pur was a purely private organisation financed by Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Talim Sangh and other private donors. Its heart and soul rested on Rama Devi and Gopabandhu Choudhury. A part of the appeal that came out in the name of Acharya Hartihar Das, President of Utkal Maulika Siksha Parshad tells it all:

.... *The System of basic national education is still in evolution and is open to criticism and analysis. The system is not a narrow, cut and dry formula. It does not tolerate conservatism though it tries to conserve all that is conducive to society in its widest sense. It is not a bluff, a make shift or a stunt, but is as telic and eclectic and progressive in its outlook as any national system of education ought to be in a free country. Our attempt is a very humble one to reconstruct education in a very remote rural area and to learn things and gather experience and detailed faithful data for future expansion of national education in a mass scale in this part of India* ....

The school had classes up to the eighth grade. It had facilities for teaching spinning and weaving and carpentry. Children grew fruits and vegetables. They sat on the floor on a mat. All of their lessons were given in vernacular. Basic Education represented something totally new. The focus of this system of education was to create future citizens with a "can do" attitude. By learning an easily available profession they were to live a self-sufficient, independent life within the village. However, this hypothesis posed a completely different set of problems of its own. Neither the educationists nor their students were prepared to face this. While the new system of education was trying to prepare the young for a self-sufficient, village oriented life style, society as a whole was being bombarded with allures of a very different world. A monthly salary supplemented by extra income from bribes; privileges involving no hard work - these were some of the alluring things that were knocking on every educated person's door. In free India, everything from one end to the other was being run by the Government. A job somewhere within the bureaucracy was the cherished goal of everyone who went to school.

India achieved its independence in a unique way. Instead of making a complete break with the past socially, politically and economically it co-opted many things from its past. A decadent past mixed with a promising future produced a present that was neither desirable nor helpful. In order to find a solution to its multitude of problems the country started cherry-picking the issues which made matters worse. Nowhere was it more prominent and self-defeating than in the field of education.

In Independent India those who remained in charge of the education system had been trained in the British system. As government employees they wanted to maintain the status quos. Any drastic change scared them and they were not suited to bring about any change in the country while the country needed change.

The most dangerous thing was that in Independent India the bureaucrats remained in charge of the education system. For them it was another department like Revenue or Industry or Irrigation. The revolutionary zeal that was behind Basic Education could never be found among them. A lot of drastic change- including in the field of education – could have been done right after the British left. The atmosphere was then full of anticipation. Everyone was hoping for change. However, that did not happen. A new set of people tried to run the country with the old mindset. "The old wine in a new bottle" people kept saying. Bureaucrats who had no sympathy for the rural poor or rural development found themselves in charge of improving the lot of the rural poor. The education department fell in the hands of those who did not see any good coming out of universal education. The situation was like a fox guarding the hen house.

The bureaucrats wanted the kind of education that perpetuated their style and tradition. They wanted their children to learn good math and science from an early age so that they could go to college and prepare themselves to become IAS officers, engineers, doctors and managers. For many, becoming a top bureaucrat within the government was the prime goal of being educated. That is why failing a large number of children at all levels was a necessity. In rural high schools sometimes more than 80% of students flunked their final exams. And they failed mostly because they could not show proficiency in the English language.

The members of India's sprawling bureaucracy had become too powerful and had acquired too much importance. Power, money and privilege piled up on their hands. Anyone who was not connected with a government office even as a clerk or a peon felt worthless. At a time when the country needed its public employees to be helpful in moving the country forward, the purpose of the bureaucrats holding their jobs seemed to be collecting bribes from the public. In that kind of atmosphere Gandhiji and his ideas seemed to be out of date. "He will take us to the age of cow dong" many of the educationists within the bureaucracy opined. And their opinion held sway throughout the country.

Contradictions

This was also a time when India was searching for its mooring. Contradictions were rampant. For example, India earned independence by using nonviolence as its means but when it came to suppressing internal dissent its leaders resorted to lathi charges and live bullets. India promised to promote a peaceful world. Because of the aggression from outside, it built up the second largest land army. Its military manufacturing also mushroomed. Large industries took shape around cities and towns where a large number of people were concentrated. But the villages where 80% of people lived became neglected. Large projects such as dams and factories and airports were built costing tens of crores of rupees. However, these needed projects were beyond the reach of the common man. And that is what the decision makers at the top wanted. So, preparing the ordinary folks and strengthening them for solid citizenship took a back seat. In that respect Basic Education became a step child of India's education system.

After Independence Nabakrushna Choudhury became a Cabinet member in the Odisha Government. However, because of a tragic personal reason he left the government within two years. While mourning and depressed, he was persuaded by Asha Devi Aryanayakam to take charge of Basic Education in Odisha. Nabakrushna Choudhury agreed and became its organizer.

With the government's cooperation and his initiative, a Basic Teacher's Training School opened in Angul. Basic schools at the primary level were open in different districts. Many of the freedom fighters welcomed such schools in their areas.

Nabakrushna Choudhury, an idea man and an activist, was the godfather of the Socialist movement in Odisha. He could not be spared for too long. A short while later, the Congress party of Odisha tapped him to be the Chief Minister of Odisha. For nine years he remained in that position. During that period Basic schools, a few up to 8th grade, took shape in different areas. However, Basic Education beyond 8th grade was not available in Odisha. After completing 8th grade the students had to go to Sevagram or Balaram Pur for higher education. However, at this time there was no college or university level education available through Basic Education.

India's education system after Independence continued to follow the old model of teaching. The classes at the college level were still being offered in English. Some of the Basic school students who wanted to go for higher studies had to take extra coaching in English and were forced to take high school exams.

In Odisha the Choudhury Government was very supportive of the Basic Education system. In the Gamu village in the Bari area and in the Champatimunda village near Angul a high school level school called Post Basic School were established. In Gamu, Sarat Chandra Maharana was the prime mover. It was a boarding school where students and teachers maintained a life as a community. With the Government's support the institution seemed to flourish. A *Zamindar* had contributed several acres of land for the school and the products from that land also helped the institution. In Champatimunda, Chittaranjan Das was in charge of the new school. For ten years from 1946 to 1956 there seemed to exist grudging support for this new type of education in the official circle. Yet, the system's underlying sense of equality remained an anathema. Because the Chief Minister was in favor of Basic Education, the officers had to go along. But in their hearts they despised the physical work at school and classlessness of the system. They looked at the United Kingdom and the United States and wanted their country to be industrialized like them. In that respect, in their view, Basic Education fell short. Yet, they did not look at the Amish people of America. Not far from Washington, the Amish population teaches its children, who go to school up to 8th grade, to read and write. Then the young adults learn to become self- sufficient by following a trade as farmers, bee keepers, carpenters, masons, brick layers, and blacksmiths and so on. The Amish people do not use electricity or automobiles and do not join the military.

The general public in its own unusual way seemed to develop a form of hatred toward physical labor. Those who held any kind of white collar job within the system helped perpetuate such a mindset. Instead of encouraging children to carve out a profession that is needed in the rural areas, they encouraged them to get a clerical job in the government. A bureaucracy can only provide so many new jobs! So, a large number of disappointed souls - young men in the prime of their youth - hung around everywhere. And Odisha was no exception. In spite of all the training for self- sufficiency, the expectation for those who were trained in Basic Education still remained to get a job somewhere in some position within the bureaucracy. A job meant status and a steady salary ensuring economic security.

Other than the traditional industries such as basket weaving or making earthen pots or weaving, there was no industry in the village. Most of the consumer goods – clothes, salt, farming tools – had to come from cities or towns outside the village area. A handful of Gandhians tried to encourage local people to use locally produced materials. They themselves wore hand spun and hand woven clothes; used locally made bags and baskets and used locally made pots and pans. But they seemed to be going against the current. The vast majority of the population was attracted to goods coming from outside. As a result each individual living in the village seemed to be working overtime to make the village poor and unlivable. This was a trend that was accepted by everyone.

Independent India, under Nehru and Congress, accepted socialism as its motto. Yet, people in the villages conveniently held on to their feudal ways. They continued their old habits and were not very open to accepting changes that a functional democracy needed. So socialism expounded by national leaders had a feudal coat around it. The Government with the help of a post-colonial bureaucracy tried to establish socialism within a feudal social structure. Neither could fit with the other and it was a mismatch of an epic scale. Given all other problems – ethnic, linguistic, economic, political and social – the country faced chaos at an alarming scale. Slowly, the importance of Basic Education got lost.

In the meantime, those students who grew up in this new education system had to adjust to the changing climate. Some of them went into teaching. Most of them worked on rural development projects. A handful of them went abroad to study and work. Compared to the number of students produced by the Basic Education system the percentage of students going to study abroad was pretty high.

Several factors seem to have contributed to the dissolution of Basic Education in India and particularly in Odisha. Apathy among the bureaucrats was the number one factor. Even if education remained in the hands of the State Government, depending on the leadership of the state and the problems the leaders faced at the time, educational reform rose or fell. The rising expectation after Independence also brought many other problems that needed the attention of the Government.

Secondly, the roots of Basic Education lay in the villages. The system hoped to create citizens who would be independent minded and self- sufficient. In order to achieve that there had to be a structural change in the society which did not happen.

In its outlook this new system of education was equalitarian. But the country was not ready for equality. Under feudalism and colonialism, the stratification of Indian society had become rigid and that touched every aspect of social interaction. The Basic Education system became a threat to stratification. Those who were powerful or wielded power in the villages or government became hostile to this education system because it threatened their interests. There were many, even in the village, who wanted their children to gain power like those people. There were some who wanted to hang on to power forever. Either way, they went against this new education system and the system increasingly lost support among those whom it wanted to lift.

Finally, those who had been working to spread the gospel of the new education system focused their attention on the Bhoodan movement.

Given the reality around the world, redistribution of land had become an urgent matter more so in India. Through the Bhoodan movement, Vinobaji and his followers wanted to achieve this goal in a nonviolent way. In Odisha, Gopabandhu Choudhury took the leadership of this movement. He also collected a band of seasoned Gandhians to work with him. Bhoodan, like the struggle for freedom, became the second coming of a nonviolent revolution in India. Gopabandhu Choudhury also inspired everyone around him to join the Bhoodan movement. Even his brother Nabakrushna who was the chief minister of Odisha at the time was not spared. The entire Choudhury clan joined the movement and Gopabandhu Choudhury and Rama Devi led the way.

Up until then, Sarat Chandra Maharana and Annapurna Maharana had been looking after Basic Education. Both were busy teaching and developing the curriculum. Annapurna Maharana had no formal education. But she was well versed in Odia, Hindi and Bengali literature. In Gandhiji's ashram she cut her teeth on the theoretical aspect of seva. While in jail she studied Indian history, politics and social development along with Bhagabad Gita. She became a translator of many useful books - Vinobaji's **Talks on Gita** and Kishorelal Mashruwala's **To Young Women**. After joining the Bhoodan movement she filled in for her brother Manmohan Choudhury in editing the **Grama Sevak** the mouth piece of the Gandhian movement in Odisha. Sarat Chandra Maharana, on his part became the secretary of the Bhoodan Yajna Board, newly formed by the government of Odisha. Gopabandhu Choudhury was its president.

Vinobaji chose the year 1957 to be the year of success for the Bhoodan activity in India. Like 1857 and 1757, he wanted the year 1957 to be a marker in India's long history. Vinobaji wanted a successful conclusion to a movement for land redistribution in India. He asked for all hands on deck. So, everyone who was anywhere within the Gandhian movement, joined in. Sarat Chandra Maharana went to collect land in Keonjhar. His coworkers Fakir Mishra, Madanmohan Sahu, Jayakrushna Biswal, Ramachandra Mishra and others went to different areas, Annapurna Maharana spent time on translating Vinobaji's speeches into Odia. Occasionally, she taught classes at Banishree. But most of her time was spent in helping the movement. After the death of her father in 1958 she remained by the side of her mother Rama Devi. Often, she had to travel around Odisha and around the country.

Redistribution of land through Bhoodan and Gramdan took a life of its own. The place of Basic Education had to be weighed in the context of economic, social and political transformation of the country. Those who were engaged in educating the young at Ramachandra Pur and Gamu were drawn into the national movement aiming a nonviolent social change in India. Nabakrushna Choudhury left the Government and became a worker in the Bhoodan movement. On taking a page from Gandhiji's quit India movement Malati Devi closed the Chamapatimunda School so that teachers and students could join the movement. The post Basic School at Gamu could not survive.

Frankly, many of the elected officials and administrators seemed to have no interest in Basic Education. Those who could have guided it in an adverse atmosphere could not spend time anymore because the movement claimed their time and energy. Basic schools came under attack

from the Government. They were turned into regular schools. Some attempts were made to keep Basic Education alive in Ramachandra Pur. But support for it among the local people had dwindled a great deal. Among many local people, for political reasons, there was hostility toward the Bhoodan movement. Their hostility spilled over to Basic Education because an anti Gandhian attitude seemed to be brewing everywhere. Even if the Bari area was a great battle field during the struggle for freedom, in recent years many of the local people who could mold public opinion became angry with anything Gandhian. It had a lot to do with the license-permit administration of the Congress Party. The Party men wore khadi clothes. Because the workers at the Basic Schools wore khadi clothes also, they were thought to be Congress Party members as well. It was a misplaced anger but anger nonetheless. Slowly, Basic Education at the primary level became primary schools owned and operated by the Department of Education. Basic Education became history. However, decades later, many of the ideas expounded by the Basic Education system have come back in different names.

Presently, nearly 60% of India's population is under thirty years of age. For the next twenty years at least they will be at the prime of their productivity. Yet, the country has no adequate means of providing them work. As a result a great deal of productive energy will go to waste. In order to arrest such decay the policy makers need to find ways to connect the burgeoning population of youth to the work they are able to do. Many of these youth are dropouts at various levels of education. They need to be trained in skills so that they can perform needed jobs without intervention and interference from the Government. This is what the system of Basic Education wanted to do.

Ideas like universal education, rural development and full employment have become common usages. Whether recognized or not they are the ideas hatched in a darkened past. Today India is projected to be a world power. It has become a pathfinder in areas of medicine, biotechnology, space science and Information technology. Unless it finds a way to provide work for its unemployed and under employed, the multitude of desperate youth who see no future for themselves, its progress stands to fail.

The examples of the Basic Education are there before us. All we have to do is look at it and employ it to our changed environment.





নহি দেবী, নহি সামান্যা নারী



[Maharana Couple]



[Parents with Karmadeva Maharana]

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Jyotibhai Desai

Jyotibhai Desai

Shri Jyoti Bhai Desai is a Gandhian activist. He spent considerable amount of time at Sevagram, Wardha, the seat of Basic Education. He had played an important role in the spreading of Basic Education in Gujrat and its organisational aspect. He is very deeply involved in all types of Gandhian activities. He was educated in Oxford. He has participated in Sarvodaya movements. In his article, he deals with Basic Education from his personal perspective.

So Live

Jyotibhai Desai

(An attempt to understand and to consider the onward more for Nai Talim)

"Man has built empires of scientific capability to manipulate the phenomena of nature into enormous manifestations of his own dreams of power and wealthbut for that he has exchanged an empire of understanding of equal magnitude, an understanding of what it is to be a part of the world not an enemy of it."[i]

The world today is passing through a crisis of restlessness, uncertainty and dissatisfaction with existing political, economic and social conditions. The crisis today is crisis of character. Indeed we want people of character, citizens who will hold their head high because of their honestly, integrity and sharing their social responsibilities. Theneed is to create a just social order. In fact this is the Quest not only of our country, but the entire world.

How shall we find man of character?

"The Illiad is the story of the siege of Troy which will fall in the dust and its defenders, who will be killed in the battle. The wife of Hector, the leader says to him; "your strength will be your destruction; and you have no pity for either your son or your unhappy wife who will soon be your widow. The Acheans will set upon you and kill you: and if I love you it would be better for me to die".

Her husband replies 'Well do I know this, and I am sure of it that the day is coming when the holy city of Troy will perish. But not so much for the Torians, nor for Hecuba herself nor for the Priam the king, not for my noble brothers who will be slain by the foe and lie in the dust. As for you, when one of the bronzeclad Acheans will carry you away in tears and end your days of freedom. Then you may live in Argos, and work at a loom, in other words in another woman's house or perhaps carry water for a woman of message or Hyperia, sore against your will; but hard compulsions will be on you. And then a man will say as he sees you weeping. "This was the wife of Hector who was noblest in the battle of this horse taming Trojans, when they were fighting around Illian". This is what they will say; and it will be fresh grief for you, to fight against slavery bereft of a husband like that. But may I be dead, may earth be heaped over my grave before I hear your cries, and the violence done to you."

So spoke the shining Hector. He took the helmet off his head and laid it on the ground, and when he had kissed his dear son, and dangled him in his arms, he prayed to Zeus and other Gods'Zeus and ye other Gods, grant this, my son be as I am, most glorious amongst the Trojans and a man of might, and greatly rule in Illion.And may they say, as he return from the war; He is far better than his father.

What moves the Greek warrior to deeds of heroism? Kitto comments 'is not a sense of duty as we understand it-duty towards other; it is rather duty towards himself. He strives after Greek arête, 'excellence'.......

Thus the hero of the Odyssey is a great fighter, a willy schemer, a ready speaker, a man of stout heart and broad wisdom who knows that he must endure without too much complaining. What the Gods send; and he can both build and sail a boat, drive a furrow as straight as any one. beat a young braggart at throwing the discus, challenge the phasing youth phracian youth at boxing. wrestling and running; flay, skin cut up and cook an ox, and be moved to tears by a song. He is in fact an excellent all-rounder; he has surpassing **arête**.

Arête implies a respect for wholeness or oneness of life and a consequential contempt for efficiency or a much higher idea of efficiency an efficiency which exists not in one department of life but is life itself.

Hector thus had found his DHARMA. This is what he was taught **arête**.[ii]

Having considered arête of GREEK herolet us move on the 20th century and think of GANDHIJI and his pursuit of TRUTH. The modern warrior excelling in arête.

'The turning point of Gandhiji's life occurred when he was thrown out of a train in Pietermartizburg in South Africa on 2nd June 1893.

Back then the first class compartments were reserved for whites only, and a white passenger objected to the presence in the compartment of an Indian though he had a ticket, he was thrown off the train, his luggage dumped on the pavement.

This incidence changed the course of history. It drew him away from a successful legal carrier and put him on the path of greatness and immortality. It made him so question his own motives and the world around him.

There were many such moments in this extra ordinary life the salt-march the Quit India movement. It would inspire many such leaders Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela.

The consequence of that incidence in Pietermartizburg would shake the greatest empire that modern would had ever seen and led to birth of a nation and changed millions of lives.

Thus, Gandhiji's search for removing injustice brought him to the root of injustice as he read "UNTO THE LAST". An honest life determining pursuit leads one further deeper experiences which enhances one's life.

Defining moments bring out the best in us. When we remember the defining moments in our lives we feel much more. If we can do something every day to bring back the spirit of those defining moments, every day,will be a celebration and not a ritual, and our lives will truly change,be extraordinary [iii].

'The spontaneous birth of a natural stream begins and with few drops, a slow burst of few bubbles. Slowly as it moves on, goes on adding more water, as it grows and grows into a stream and then a river and as it proceeds further it can cut through any rock or any obstacle and gains more force and continues to gain strength. Yet the real part is the inherent goal to meet the sea. Such is the kind of effort that manifests into a dynamic life. Such a life belongs to a true educator.'[iv]

'Even if GANDHI could, for the briefest while, transform some people and make them taller than they were or again ever be, he achieved more than'.....any educator!'[v].

Writing on education Gandhiji quoted Prof Huxley. 'His body is the servant of his will and does its work with ease and pleasure...his mind is stored with knowledge of the fundamental truths of nature, his passions are under the control of a vigorous will and tender conscience; he has learned to hate all vilemess and to respect others as himself – and no other has had a liberal education.'[vi]

Translating this basic concept of a man having an ideal education Gandhiji advocated.

'I would therefore begin the child's education by teaching a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. I hold that the hightest development of the mind and the soul is possible under such a system of education. Only every handicraft has to be taught not mechanically as is done today but scientifically i.e. the child should know why and wherefore of every process.'

'The ulterly false concept that intelligence can be developed only through book-reading should give place to the truth that the quickest development of the mind can be achieved by the artisan work being learnt in a scientific manner. True development of the mind commences immediately the apprentice is taught at every step why a particular manipulation of the hand or tool is required.'[vii]

Marjorie sykes asks some simple questions to modern parents – taking the ideas started above by Gandhiji.

'Do we put faith in gadgeting or in a personal relationship as the means of human development. To put it bluntly, how do children learn what is important? from a TV or a Computer? Or from personal contact with a wise and loving adult, among five and take of work and play with other children. Manny of our arguments about educational organisations equipment and techniques are based on our differing, but unspoken assumption about the very nature of education, is it putting in information or drawing out of human potential?'[viii]

The above ideas were imbibed by Baba and Ma (ARYAYANAYAKAMS), Maryorie, and in Gujarat by Nanabhai and Jugatrambhai all along their lives.

The live community of youths that the Aryanakams created can be represented in the words of Tagore which he had used for Shantiniketan.

"For these boys vacation has no meaning, their studies, though strenuous and not a task, being permeated by a holiday spirit which takes shape in activities in their kitchen their vegetable garden their weaving, their work of small repairs. It is because their class-work has not been stretched or walked in from their vacation, because it has been part of their daily life that it easily carries itself by its own outward flow......"

"The spirit of sacrifice and comradeship, the disinterested desire to help others, which the boys have developed are rare in children who have better opportunities. It was the active healthy life which brought out in a remarkably quick time all that was good in them and the accumulated

rubbish of impurities was swept off. The daily work which they are doing brought before them moral problems in concrete shape of difficulties and claimed solutions for them. The logic of facts showed them reality of moral principles of life, and now they feel astonished at instances when other boys do not understand it. They take utmost delight in cooking, weaving, improving their surroundings, rendering services as to other boys; very often secretly lost they should feel embarrassed."

"In ordinary messing organisations, members claim for more than provided, but these boys willingly simplify their needs paterntly understand the inevitableness of imperfections. They are made to realize that the responsibility is mostly theirs, and every luxury becomes a burden when a great part of its pressure is not upon other peoples shoulders. Therefore instead of idly grumbling at deficiencies they have to think and manage for themselves to improve their dietary they must put extra zest into vegetable growing. They have their tools, and their mother wit for their small needs and their endavour is sure to have crude results, yet these values which exceeds all market prices........"

"The educational institutions, which I have founded, have primarily for its object the constant pursuit of truth, from which the imparting of truth naturally follows. It must not be a dead cage in living minds are fed food artificially prepared. It should be an open house, in which students and teachers are at one. They must live their complete 'life together, dominated by common aspiration for truth and a need for sharing all the delights of culture. In former days the great master craftman had students in their workshops where they co-operated in sharing things to perfection. That was the place where knowledge becomes living- that knowledge which not only has its substance and low, but its atmosphere subtly informed by a creative personality. For intellectual knowledge also has its aspect of its creative art, in which the man who explores truth expresses which is human in his enthusiasm, his courage, his honesty, his skill. In merely academic teachingwe find subjects, but not the man who pursuits that subject, therefore the vital part of education remains incomplete."

For our universities we must claim not labeled packages of truth, and authorized agents to distribute them, but truth in its living association with lovers and seekers and discoverers"[ix]

Thus, Nai Talim Bhavan at Sevagram was created by "Baba and Maa" – as they were fondly called – committed to the core truths of Nai Talim- as a unique place where it can be claimed that it was here that individuals found a purpose to live.

To quote K.G. Sayadin, a votary of Nai Talim "The function of the university is not merely to unlock the powers of creative imagination in as many individuals as possible but also creating a sense of compelling purpose, a high concern for noble ends which will raise the tempo of their whole life and extend the frontiers of their reach... It is not merely quality of their ends but the nature of their life purpose, this concern and intensity with which it is embraced that will determine the measure of their civilized achievement[x].

People like Baba, Ma, Marjorie and in Gujarat Nanabhai, Jugatrambhai picked up the flag of Nai Talim and attempted to live upto the expectations of basic concepts. There is more to learn from

the experiences of these stalwarts and spread the light that they gained to bring about an essential revolution in and through education.

In the very beginning of the 20th century, the uneasiness about the imposed British rulers educational system was clearly felt all over our country. Nanabhai Bhatt started in the city of Bhavangar Daxinamurti Bhawan in 1910. He started this to impart true Bhrahminic culture. But as he came in contact with Gandhiji, he disagreed with his Guru and started admitting the untouchable children in his school. Further on he disagreed with his life-member colleagues on the exclusiveness of education based on then fashionable elitist theories. He a former university lecturer went out to the village Ambla and started Gram Daxinamurti, a village school in 1932. This grew further into Lokbharati at Sanosra, which was an higher education attempt in Nai Talim. In fact in 1953 the annual National Nai Talim conference was held at Lokbharati where all the innovators, and experimenters in Nai Talim of the entire country came together to exchange views and future work. Dr. Athur Morgan who had been impressed by the Sevagram Programme developedby Aryanayakam during his visit in 1943 suggested to the Government of India to promote Rural Institutes, on similar lines as the Sevagram Program. It was obvious that Nanabhai would be invited by the Government of India to have such an Rural Institute. Lokbharati accepted an Agriculture Diploma program for the Rural Institute. But his insistence was of mother tongue Gujarati as the medium of instruction at Sanosara RI. This was objected by a central government officer when he visited the RI Nanabhai rejected his advice and handed the officer a cheque of the entire amount of money that were granted by the government.

"As a principle of Nai Talim we will not accept any other language but the mother tongue as medium of instruction. Hence we do not accept any dictates from any authority and will never compromise on our basic principles" Dr. Shrimali the then education minister came down to Sanosra and said to Nanabhai. "It is a matter of our pride that Lokbharati has accepted the RI program. We accept that where Rural Education is concerned there is no one better equipped than you, your honourable person, hence no rules will be applied to your program' What then followed was, within a couple of years of experience and performance of the Lokbharati RI Students, all the Rural Institutes in 14 states of India switched on to mother tongue as the medium of instruction!

For Nanabhai,neither government grants, private donors, nor religious foundations could move him to accept any condition except those clearly conducive to the principles of Nai Talim.

During the no-tax satyagraha in Bardoli of the south Gujarat farmers, a group of inmates of Sabarmati Satyagraha Ashram were sent to support the efforts of Sardar Patel. In this group was Jugatram Dave who was also a teacher at Sabarmati Ashram. During his visit in the area of no-tax campaign Gandhiji insisted that this campaign should also have full participation of local Tribal Community and it should not only be of the Patel land holders. Thus the Vedchhi Ashram was founded in 1924 as a Khadi training center. It flowered under the committed leadership of Jugataramji. Gandhijivisited Vedchhi in 1927 when a regional Tribal conference was organized. One of the essential conditions for anyone who wanted to be a member of the organizing group for the conference was that their person and his entire family were wearing self-made Khadi only.

1100 families enrolled, as they had all been now well involved in the on the going campaign and were weaving then Khadi and spinning their threads too.

During that visit Gandhiji also saw the village school and met the children. He wrote: "The major role of craft in the educating these children has been an achievement, children gather literary education without any special efforts. We may not be as good as Jugatram in achieving what he has. But were we to develop the care and love he gives in educating these children we can easily spread this type of education all over the country. That would really provide true education to the country whose major backbone is agriculture. These tribal children are gaining all that is essential for a honest life. They learn how to remain healthy. They become self-confident and know how to be self- sufficient and gather the treash of patriotism. It is a wrong concept that only the tribal children can get education in this school and that the children of crorepatis will learn nothing here. Were a tribal child to go to the school of these crorepatis s/he will be suffocated. And where a tribal child is suffocated, let this be clear to us, the nation itself as a whole will be asphyxiated."

Somewhere in 1984, A scholar of Gandhi & Tolstoy from the U.S. asked Jugatramji – the founder of Vedchhi Ashram "How do you decide when to offer Satyagraha and when to continue with the constructive work (Village development)

"I never went to prison, the prison came to me" he answered, and added "we do not seek issues nor do we seek confrontations. Ours is a way of life. So live,SO LIVE !that the perpetrator of injustice, be it the state or the landlord, may understand how to correct their mistakes. A true Satyagrahi (One who offers Satyagraha) lives all the 24 hours with a total consciousness to create a society where truth and love prevail".

Abraham Lincon addressed people who gathered at the function of inaugurating the Gettysburg (Battlefield – Civil War) closing battle memorial. He spoke for much less than five minutes to people who had gathered from all over but those words are still with all of us who seek "What more can be done".

Lincon said "Four score and seventy years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battle field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that their nation might line. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in larger sense, we cannot dedicate we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, for above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they fought here, have thus far, nobly advanced. It is rather before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave

last full measure of their devotion – that we highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth [xi].

The challenge is the legacy of the foregone experimenters, believers, and of those who gave their best to create Nai Talim as envisaged by Gandhiji.

What we presently observe is that Basic education is on the way out, going to be extinct.

An eclipse darkens our vision. The Sun or the Moon is discovered by the Rakshas Rahu! Yes the Rakshasa is greed! The emphasis of using and having more 'HAVE MORE' has created a greed which cannot be sustained by a planet. So Gandhiji said "were we to irritate the industrial societies it would require six more such planets." This is where the question of a same society arises. Thus the ultimate Quest is for becoming human.

'Yet the lesson of history of human kind is that, in spite of failures, violence and wars the more is onwards towards the goal of humanizing the species. The present times are full of choice for the path to take. Do we surrender to the forces of destruction which are ready to overpower us with greed in us or are we going to be masters of ourselves. What is GOOD is known to us. Who else but the youths will pick up the challenge? And the best soldiers for a total revolution are teachers. Teachers like those about whom we have learnt as above. They are our inspirers. Gandhiji too continues to inspire and advice even at present. His spirit, his dedication 'I have endeavoured to explain SWARAJ as I understand it, and my conscience testifies that my life henceforth is dedicated to its attainment"[xii].

The Mirror Test – there is a clear cut range for adversity, which might be called the Mirror Test. The image comes from the German ambassador in London who as a part of celebration he had to host in honour of Britain's King Edward VII, was asked to provide a bevy of prostitutes. The diplomat felt that he could not do this and instead resigned his position. Asked why, he responded "I refused to see a pimp in the mirror in the morning when I shave". Only when we can look proudly in the mirror can we said to have affirmed our identity, of course the hacker who cripples a network, or the politician who has no intention of fulfilling his promises may be proud of what he has gotten away with. In such cases, it is necessary to involve the universal mirror test. "What would it be like to live in a world if everyone were to behave in the way I have"[xiii].

What would we say to aspiring young workers (these are the final words of three senior most psychologist of USA who came together to talk about GOOD WORK)- or to put to the acid test, what would we say to young people for whom we have some responsibility....

"Having principles and support of others may not be enough. You need a vital ingredient – the resolve to stick to your principles. Knowing what should be done and having means to do it are useless without personal commitment. In the last analysis no one else is responsible for upholding your values of your work. Either you live upto the implicit covenant that justified your professional status or you do not...All of us who believe in GOOD WORK find inspiration is what the anthropologist Margaret Mead said:

"Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has".[xiv]

Finally 'Be well, do good work and keep in touch!'

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i. Zen & Art of Motorcycle Maintenance
ii. Zen & Art of Motorcycle Maintenance
iii. Sunday 'The Hindu', 3rd June, 2013
iv. Pandit Suklaji
v. "Non-Violence" by Prof. Sudhir Choudhary
vi. Hind Swaraj by Gandhiji, Navjivan Publishing
vii. Ibid
viii. Ibid
ix. Shantiniketan, R. Tagore
x. Saiyadin University
xi. Team of Rivals, Lincoln
xii. Nanabhai, Bharati Bhatt
xiii. Good Work, Gardner & Others
xiv. Margaret Mead







[Karmadeva Maharana & Swapna Mahapatra]



[Sarat Chandra Maharana]



[Sarat Chandra Maharana with sons]

भवार्णव नौका

Karmadeva Maharana

Some of my earliest memories are the journey to Chandil with my mother(we called her Gaga) and the extended family for attending the SarvodayaSammilani. It was 1953. Days prior to that, I remember, on Gaga's instructions, my brother and I were practising mixing salt and water to make a drinkso that we can ward off sun stroke in the Lu (burning hot winds) of Chandil.Next year we went to Gaya and I vaguely remember Gaga showing me theriver bed and the Bodhisattwa tree in Bodhgaya, and on our return paththe Zoo in Calcutta, we were taught geography, biology etc. by such directpractical means. Then she took me to the Sammilanis at Puri, Kanchipuram,Pandharpur, Sevagram and Chebrol, a veritable tour of half of India beforeI was ten.Gaga used to chant "Gangecha Yamune chaiva Godavari..."

गंगेच यमुने चैव गोदावरी सरस्वती ।
नर्मदा सिंधु कावेरी जलेऽस्मिन् सान्निधं कुरु ।।

while pouring water over me for the bath. The deeper meaning, the unity of India, the divinity of water, all that followed to dawn on me gradually. Andwhenever I take bath or see a river, anywhere, the memories come flooding back to me, my mother singing and I repeating the words. All life is sacred. So is, all the more, the source that sustains it. Civilizations and knowledge were created on their banks. Alas! now all our rivers are ravaged.Shankaracharya was the one every Indian (Hindu) mother, even illiterateones, wanted her son to emulate. And Gaga was well versed even with theintricacies of the philosophy of Shankara. Mohamudgar's relevant portionedfor a child was poured down on me along with the water, to clean me, purify me, to ready me for my journey into life.

नलिनीदलगतजलमिततरलम्, तद्वज्जीवितमतिशयचपलम् ।
क्षणमिह सज्जनसंगतिरैका, भवति भवार्णवतरणे नौका ॥
अविनयमपनय विष्णो दमय मनः शमय विषयमृगतृष्णाम् ।
भूतदयांविस्तारय तारय संसारसागरतः॥

Buddha's dictums and many of the slokas from Upanishads, Nitivakyas, andothers were appropriately selected for a three year old. Sometimes simplifiedwords substituted so that I can pronounce them and even understand a little.This was till she taught me swimming in the Brahmani and I graduated toa swim in the river for a bath. Gaga would sing innumerable songs, of thegreat poets of Orissa, of Kabir, Surdas, Tulsidas, Tagore, favourite prayersof Gandhiji, recite the verses from Gita, Upanishads, Panchatantra, Stotras,Shankaracharya, and what not, throughout the day, while performing all chores and duties.

I also remember that during the great flood of 1955. I wasfour years old. We two returned from Remuna to cut off Ramachandrapur bya boat from Jenapur, the river was still in spate. We reached our two roomcottage, Budhimaaghara, and found that more than one foot of the walls

havebeen washed away, the mud walls above that level clinging to the frame madeof bamboo branches. Gaga immediately repaired it by making quality mudand giving a coat of cow dung. The floor remained damp for weeks. Everyyear there were several big floods; this one was thebiggest over decades, tobe surpassed by that of 1960. The area was cut off. In the height of the floodAmi, Gaga and Ba(my father) and a few brave souls went into the dangerouswaters with a small boat to inaccessible marooned families, most of themclinging to thatched rooftops in submerged houses, distributed relief, andrescued people. Without any life jacket around, needless to say, that askedfor courage of the highest order. Gandhiji had asked them to be fearless,and they were, against all adversaries, from the wrath of nature to thewrath of the empire.

We, the children in the family, in our generation, werea privileged lot. We grew up among the salt of the earth, men and womenof whom any civilization and country would be proud of. These includedgreat freedom fighters, social thinkers and reformers, revolutionaries, scientists, philosophers, educationists, farmers and honest village folks, animals,rivers and nature. Of course, Gaga grew up in the company that includedGandhiji himself and a galaxy of his close friends, not to speak of just the cream of Orissa. Ami's uncle, Madhusudan was quite a personality. Instead of becoming a towering national leader like Gokhale, he preferred to save the Oriya race from its demise and developed handicrafts and village industries. Gandhiji specifically used to come to meet him in Cuttack. Gandhiji acknowledged in his writings that he was initiated to the concept of village industries by him. Mr.Das's idea that hand and brain must work together for a proper education (which is also the motto of MIT, mens et manus) led Gandhiji to the idea of Basic Education in which he added soul. Such are the persons who influenced her life. Unlike Mahadev Desai who remarked that he joined Gandhi after just observing the company Gandhiji was keeping, what made her father along with the whole family to join Gandhi cannot perhaps put in a single sentence. But the posterity proves Gopabandhu Chaoudhuri (Jeje) to be justified; just compare the contents of the list admirers and friends of Gandhi and your favourite hero from any field of human activity.
We grew up among exceptional persons, such as, many of once illiterate ladies who had responded to the call of Gandhiji and had been imprisoned for joining the freedom movement. Saintly, learned persons who were leading an ascetic life renouncing grea' wealth and fame to work among the down trodden, people experimenting with a new type of education, doctors dedicating their lives to serve the rural poor, terrorists turned Gandhians who would be spinning every day till the very end of their life, a veritable collection of weird, outstanding, unusual and visionary characters.

Since my birth I knew, among the remarkable ladies, Annapurna Das,and Gaga induced to me to call her Maa. She had a bachelor degree withhonours in Oriya literature, a rare distinction for an Oriya girl at that time.She was inspired by the life and work of Gandhiji and wante' o dedicate herlife towards the uplift of the lives of the downtrodden women and to provideeducation to children. She became the Pratinidhi of the Orissa branch ofKasturba Gandhi S. arak Trust at that time and devoted most of her lifeto the noble cause. Her fearlessness and sacrifice were legendary. Whenstout young men were afraid to go near cremation grounds of Hin ndgraves of Muslims in broad day light, she would fearlessly tread through in thedark, after crossing the river Kharsuan at Ginjharpur and then the cremationgrounds and in the lonely and desolate 5 miles to Ramachandrapur throughthe marshy (fens?) Paata which did not have a single place of

shelter, noreven a tree in it. One can easily loose ones way in the vast expanse. Shewas a saintly lady with little possession. She used to study the writings ofgreat Gandhian scholars and transcribe them into Oriya in such a lucid waythat the illiterate and young girls and ladies who joined Kasturba Trust, toserve the nation, could not only understand it but took the philosophy totheir hearts and made it the mission of their life, till the end; many died inharness in their late sixties and seventies. She was instrumental in trainingscores of dedicated workers and lived a life glowing in sublime, spiritualsplendour, pure in thought and action. She also trained hundreds of womenworkers who served the government in villages in community development programmes.

In the early sixties, she along with Gaga set up the All IndiaCentre for lady Shanti Senas at the headquarters of Sarva Seva Sangh,Rajghat, Varanasi. The trainees subsequently provided exemplary socialservice all over India. Later she was entrusted with the Head Quarters ofKGNM Trust and Indore, and afterwards joined the Brahmavidya Ashramfor Ladies at Paunar that was started by Vinobaji to make ladies masterBrahmavidya. It was proscribed in scriptures for girls to have any foray inthat knowledge and Vinobaji wanted to abolish that taboo. In the late fortiesand fifties at Ramachandrapur, she lived in a one room mud-cottage with aspacious veranda in sylvan surroundings. In front of the cottage stood aguava tree on which climbed a thick *Malati* creeper full of flowers. She wouldbe reading or giving a discourse to the inmates, with the breeze from theriver wafting the fragrance of the flowers. Sometimes she would climb upthe tree to pluck and give us, the small children who were still not capableof climbing trees, guavas. She would often visit the mothers of those whowere martyred in the police firings during the 1942 Quit India movement inKaipada, Kalamatia. She would also write poems and recite poems of greatOriya masters. She was much devoted to the work of training young womenwho will go out to build an India of their dreams. She and Gaga werevery close to each other. I was too young to understand the mentality ofsupremacy and dominance that pervades in certain cultures throughout theworld, as we were never exposed to this type of attitude. However, in Indiaeven some Gandhian social workers think that the culture and traditionsof their region are the best in India and everyone in India should aspire topractice that only. Firstly these people do no really know what culture,heritage and tradition is. I later heard that Maa would vehemently opposethis ignoramus and put forth examples of other parts of India where the practices are more profound and more magnanimous and at least as ancient.

Gaga had seen the birth of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust as she attended the meeting to which Gandhiji had invited her mother, Rama Devi. Rama Devi's was the proposal for the Trust to work for uplifting and health and education of rural women and children that had appealed to him the most. For that a all women work force is to be trained at rural centres for maternity care, Pre-Basic and Basic education, in close cooperation with the centres for implementation of Gandhiji's constructive programmes. All money was to be handled by women. Gaga often would vividly describe how Gandhiji told in Hindi "Barbad hone do" when some top leader of Congress objected to his proposal saying that they would only squander the money collected with so much effort. Gandhiji appointed Rama Devi as the Pratinidhi of KGNM Trust from Utkal. She also became a Trustee. Later,Gaga alsobecame a Trustee.

Gopabandhu Choudhuri and Rama Devi had trodden down the inaccessible flood devastated Bari on Gandhiji's advice to start constructive programmes along with the freedom movement after his

Harijan Padayatra in Orissa in 1934. They had taken along with them seven young girls. Gaga was in her teens like most others, and some of them had already served prison terms. They constructed a thatched cottage in which neither a single piece of wood (beam or plank) was used nor a single iron nail was hammered, to identify them with the lowliest of the society. This experiment was to understand their problems and to find methods to ameliorate those. The philosophy of Vedanta, Buddha, Christ and the writings of Tolstoy had influenced them. Grandfather and mother would work in the fields as any other woman labourer and earn as little, though she would perform much more work than an average labourer. When cutting paddy, she would get one eightieth of what she has cut, that was the wage at that time. Then she thought that she had equalled them in poverty and is one of them and expressed this opinion to one of the fellow labourer. The lady in reply said something, the effect of which reverberated throughout Gaga's life and we could see its effect every day till Gaga was in her nineties, as long as it was possible for her to work. The woman labourer said, "No, you can never be equal to us. You cook with fire made with branches of trees and logs as fuel. We have to go home and gather dried leaves, if available, and light a fire and cook." From that day onward Gaga would sweep the fallen leaves, where ever she was, and try to cook with the fire lit from those leaves.

My grandparents were revered by many as ideal human beings. In Bari, afterwards, in the late thirties, younger girls, some not even in their teens, joined this Ashram; Gandhiji had named it *Seva Ghara*. Their parents wished them to live there and get trained in a new life style. Along with fighting the foreign rule, they experimented with agriculture, growing vegetables and fruit trees that were never seen in the region. They created a new breed of cattle, now known as Binjharpur breed, were the first in the state to start bee keeping, made rawsugar out of palm and date juice as an alternative to making the evil alcoholic drink out of it, constructed latrines for the villagers and taught them hygiene by example, started Khadi production, a tannery, basic schools, maternity centre, community meals with Harijans, fight against superstitions, relief work in floods, preventing epidemics and nursing the affected, creating communal harmony, adult education (till a few days before her death, Gaga was teaching her nurse Oriya and Hindustani), all the constructive programmes of Gandhiji and some more. The workers of Gandhi Seva Sangh, All India Spinners Association and Harijan Sevak Sangh were also immersed in these activities. All of them courted arrest during the 1942 Quit India Movement. The Ashram, which was the nerve centre of the constructive programmes of Gandhiji as well as that of freedom movement, was completely demolished by the British. Gandhiji wrote about the performance of the team of girls under my grandmother in 1934 Harijan Padyatra being matchless. When my grandfather asked, in 1937, what should be the best for his daughter to pursue, Gandhiji told him to send her to his Ashram at Sevagram, Wardha so that he would see to her education. The day she arrived there, Kasturba was trying to pull out a mattress. When Gaga helped her to get it out and asked her where to put it, Kasturba told that it was for my mother and Kasturba was going to prepare the bed herself on Gandhiji's instructions! In the Ashram Gaga with her over enthusiastic zeal devoted herself to the task of preparing Khadi, particularly sitting down to weave for long hours at a stretch. That resulted in her suffering from piles. Gandhii consulted Dr. Sushila Nayar and arranged for her surgery at Wardha. He himself walked down to Wardha to visit her in the hospital after the operation. Afterwards, when the idea of spreading the new type of education, Gandhiji's brainchild of the Basic Education programme, wasmooted, famous

educationists from all over India, such as Zakir Hussain,Aryanayakam, Vinoba, Kishorelal Mashruwala, Kaka Kalelkar, K.T. Shah,J.C. Kumar Appā, were assembled at Wardha and drew up a plan. It wasalso decided to start a training programme. Gandhiji selected Gaga to bethe first student of the training school for Basic Education in Wardha whileshe was staying with the Gandhi family.

The Kasturba Centre was later set up at Ramachandrapur, two milesfrom Bari and on the river Brahmani, where a Basic school and teachers' training school was established in 1938 on the advice of Gandhiji and others.Many young girls joined the Kasturba centre after the independence. Some ofthem were young widows, some were deserted by their in laws. Most of themwere illiterates. My grandmother and mother's task was to console them,wipe out the trauma from their lives, bring back the joys and infuse a newlife and prepare them so that they dedicate themselves towards service to themankind as envisioned by Gandhi along with the upliftment their intellectand ... of the soul. The first thing to make them at home was to dress andappear like them, so that they do not feel alienated. But many of them werefrom orthodox Hindu families, and for them, rightly or wrongly, husband isan incarnation of God, and they had to show and express their respect for thedeparted in a strict dress code of no vermilion mark, no bangles and jewellery,simple vegetarian food and shunning of all luxuries. Gaga offered Gandhiji,who was asking for donation, all the gold bangles this eight year old girl waswearing while attending a meeting by Gandhiji. At that time Gandhiji puta condition that he would only accept the bangles if she promises that shewill not put on any ornament for rest of her life. And she had not only kepther promise, but had understood the underlying philosophy. She did noteven put on the vermilion mark, nor wear any bangles as she was workingwith the Kasturba Lady workers, many of them widows and some destitutes.Her Khadi Sarees were very few, hand spun by her in my childhood, wereof very simple in design and frugal. She used to wear one thin iron bangleon insistence of her mother in law. The inmates of Kasturba Centre hada very tough life starting at 4.30 in the morning. They had to sweep thewhole compound, sanctify the floors and walls with cow dung-mixture, aftertaking bath and the Ashram prayers of Gandhiji modified to be suitable inthe local context. Then there were classes for reading and writing, selectedwritings from great thinkers and reformers were read out and there would beelaborations and discussions. They have to cook and do all other chores alongwith gardening, spinning, weaving and learning new skills. They were trainedto impart basic education to the child starting at the Pre-Basic schools ofGandhian type, which was an adaption of Maria Montessori's methods withfurther improvisations. They were also trained in midwifery and nursing,learn to ride bicycle so that they can reach farther off places, child rearing,animal husbandry, community and rural development.They had to go tothe villages to interact with the womenfolk and children, educate them andremove the superstitions. She taught them how to ride a bicycle, which wasa new phenomenon in that region. There were flood ravages almost every yearand relief works and tackling the epidemics was routine for them. Decadeslater, when I read Hugo's description of the convent life in Les Miserables, Iremembered the ladies of Kasturba Centre; they further had as well Gandhianvision and mission to fulfill as an extra task and were doing it cheerfully. Andthey were a happy lot, and full of love and affection towards all of us. Theywere closer to us than any blood sister or aunt. And mother was the mentorand coworker in all these.

Many of them performed sterling work in the inaccessible places in Koraput,Keonjhar. Sambalpur and other districts. Parbati Giri had joined freedommovement and was arrested when she was a girl of twelve. Prabha Devi,Malati Biswal, Sachibala Panda, Parbati Swain, Basanti Mishra, AnusuyaDevi, Krushnapriya Devi, besides our aunts, to name a few of the outstanding workers. Along with many other achievements, they eradicated Yawscompletely with the help of Dr. Isaac Santra.

Gaga had been practicing the complete process of producing Khadi clothes,from her childhood, starting with the planting the cotton seeds to carding,making slivers, spinning and weaving. Spinning of highest quality yarn was alegacy that came down from the house of Madhusudan Das, for generations.So I was inducted to spinning with a Takli at four years and graduated tospinning with a charkha as soon as I could handle one. I still remember thejoy and excitement of watching mother making a bundle out of the first 2640feet of yarn I had spun. I had never imagined that out of the knotty andinconsistent yarn that I had made, anyone can make a bundle worth weaving. My brother had been spinning. weaving and presenting his products tograndfather and others by then. We are perhaps the last human beings whoare wearing Khadi unbroken.

I could still hear her immense repertoire of lullabies that she sang to meas a child and sang to every baby and child she came across, in Oriya, Bengali, Hindi and English, Marathi. In our childhood, every day after lunch shewould certain to tell us from her inexhaustible treasure trove of her memory,stories, recite poems,sing songs or read something, and also in the eveningsif I am not already asleep. These were chosen from the works of Ramayana,Mahabharat, Tales of Rajasthan, stories from Greek and Roman civilizations, Tolstoy, Corbett, Utkala Kahani of Praharaj, Grimm brothers, FakirMohan, Dase Apane, Madhusudan, Radhanatha, Godavarish (who was herfather in law's student), Rabindranath, Abanindranath, French revolution,slavery... and some created by herself, about saints and satans, animals andspirits, bravehearts and deceptors, a veritable collage of imagination, ideas

and philosophies. There was never any pressure on us to perform. We wereleft to decide for ourselves to choose the path we would like to take in life.

Once, in childhood, I got up at 4:30 am. Gaga is always up by then. Sheshowed me the stars and told me theirs names, and the constellations. Sheknew each of them, those having Sanskrit names, s and later wrote about them in newspapers and in a book. She also pointed out to me the starArundhati, a faint one just below Vasishtha in the Saptarshi or the Polarbear constellation. She told me the stories related to the sage Vasishtha,and the origin of the name Arundhati, his wife who never put any hurdleor restraint in his path of life. She had taken the example to her heart! Sothe ideal is to be followed and she kept true to her belief. This was a mostdifficult vow to adhere to, a Tapasya of highest level, which anyone havingthe minimum experience in conjugal life would realize. And she never didwaver.

The Bhoodan movement started in 1951 and now all of Gaga's familyjoined it. Gaga also took part, but before joining she explained and convincedme, a child of five and of some arrogant ways, the importance of the missionto such an effect that I happily gave permission to her to take leave of me forhalf a year. Before that she took me to the river and taught me swimming, sothat I will

not drown by any chance. She had arranged it with the inmatesof the Kasturba Centre, who were more than sisters and aunts to me, totake care of me and they indeed looked after me in the most benevolent andmagnanimous manner. And I contended that I also have contributed myshare towards a revolutionary cause.

Jeje had a bout of fever in 1957 and he preferred to stay at Bari, perhaps also to take stock in his mind of the state of Bhooodan and Sarvodayamovement. Gaga took me along to stay in Nuaghara at Bari to look afterhim. As always, he was experimenting there with new types of crops andplants. I would sit on the parapet of the mud house in which we lived andorder it to move to welcome the imaginary tiger riding saint. But most of mytime would be spent with my grandfather in the fields, cutting grass, paddy,kenafs and feeding the bullocks, climbing trees, swimming at Kantakar,a veritable paradise for a child of six. I would playfully help grandfatherin making bundles of jute. With a little imagination these are made suchenjoyable activities, now they would call it child labour. The temperamentand character of the teachers of my school, paid a pittance as salary, was ofsuch high order that all of them went to prison in 1942 Quit India movement.But still I did not miss my school. Ami was staying in a remote Keonjharvillage and fell seriously ill. She was brought to Cuttack. Gaga went thereto nurse her and suddenly Jeje passed away. Gaga happened to be presentduring the death of her grandmother, father, mother, uncle, aunts, brother,Acharya Mahasaya, Hota Mahasaya, Gunanidhi Mohanty, Iswarlal Vyas, almost all the older beloved ones, except for my father who passed away inthe hospital. And with her inner strength, her philosophy of life perfectedunder the influence the great souls as well as her own realizations, she wouldnot weep but see to the arrangements to be done and console others. Herown life came to an end in the presence of her sister in law, sons, daughter-in-law, dear ones including her care takers while her favourite bhajans andsongs were being sung.

After Jeje passed away, Acharya Harihar at his lateseventies and completely blind, started a Padayatra to tour the whole Orissato keep living the Sarvodaya movement. My father joined him.After Ami recovered sufficiently, Gaga came back to us forabout a year, but was assigned the charge to run the first training coursefor the Lady Shanti Senas to be conducted at Sarva Seva Sangh, Varanasi.So along with Maa we went to Varanasi . We lived in verandah of the hallwhere the lady trainees from all over India were staying. An enclosure wasmade after nailing down a few planks and creating a window. That was ourroom for over six months, including the harsh winter. She would take me,on foot, to the Kasturba Centre near Sarnath and to meet Shankar RaoDeo at Rajghat. I could also get a chance to sit near and listen to DadaDharmadhikary, Dhiren Mazumdar, Kaka Kalelkar and many other close associatesof Gandhiji.

I was fortunate to be with Gaga to hear Pandit Omkarnath.She extensively toured later the ravines of Chambal on foot for monthsas a follow up Sarvodaya work to the laying down of arms at the feet of JayaPrakash Narayan by the legendary Mohar Singh, Madho Singh and othergangs. She suffered a sunstroke there but I came to know of it only fourdecades later.

Gaga would grow vegetables. When I was four years old, once some of herswineherd-family friends came to visit her. She presented them with quite afew bunches of tomatoes, the best quality to be seen anywhere. I was at theage when children had outgrown the habit of giving everything to everyone,or sharing everything and had wisen up to ownership and selfishness,

twovery non-Gandhian qualities. I had the good sense not to protest her giftingaway the choicest tomatoes, but as soon as they left I asked her to go afterthem and bring back the tomatoes. She tried different ways to pacify me,but the ultimate trick that did sober me up was by quoting a Oriya saying,difficult to translate, "A giver (donor) taking back the gift, in whateverform. is a dung eater". An universal lesson on etiquette, morality and dignity.

In the year 1964 there were communal riots in Jamsedpur, Rourkela andother places. All grown up family members rushed to Rourkela to quell theriots. Gaga and Kshetrabasibhai saved many people from certain death. After almost half a century, she would describe how she saved one young personwho was hiding in an abandoned dilapidated building, and the expression offear in his eyes and his tremoring body as he was brought out of the placeby her, how that was still haunting her. They arranged for the settlement ofthe fragmented families.

In 1966 came the severe drought and calamitous famine in Kalahandiand neighbouring districts. Again all adult members of the family plungedinto relief work. My brother rushed to a remote area to run free kitchen.Ami and Gaga brought hundreds of orphans to orphanages and started anorphanage at Madhusudan Das's birth place in Satyabhamapur, specificallyfor girl children. Jaya Prakash Narayan helped a lot in arranging materialdonations for relief work. The relief work has to continue with the Biharfamine, cyclones in coastal Orissa in 1969, 71, and all the floods, the onlypermanent companions of Orissa. My parents accompanied Ami, Sarvodayaworkers, Kasturba Lady workers, and volunteer doctors to a refugee campwith around 2 lakh refugees from East Bengal to do relief work. It wasdifferent sort of challenge, there were many more afflictions like atrocitiesof Pakistani soldiers to amolierate, mental trauma of losing family members,seeing relatives getting butchered, suffering from diseases. They had to setup temporary hospitals as well. Some of the members would tell us, wheneveryone was dead tired after over work and were asleep, in the middleof the torrential downpour, in the pitch dark night, through knee deep mudGaga would be still trodding fully drenched, the lone one to attend the cryingbabies, the cholera stricken patients and save their lives. But amidst all theseshe was thinking about society, human souls, learning the lessions of life and all that nature was offering her to enrich her life.

Then came the JP movement. Again everyone in the family, ever hopeful ofthe youth coming to senses, were in excitement, perhaps a new chapter willbegin. The emergency was declared by the Indira government on June 26,1975, the biggest assault on what Gaga's family had fought to free India.Ami and Gaga immediately called a meeting. Ami signed a statement opposing emergency and pamphlets were immediately printed by NikunjaGuruji. Mamu and Dada Jeje were soon arrested along with many fromSarvodaya and taken to unknown destinations. Ami, Gaga and Ba opposedthe emergency by holding meetings, rallies, writing against it. Ami and Gagawere effectively in house arrest as a police picket was posted at their placeof residence, Bhoodan Office.

Adivasis (Tribals) were very dear and close to the heart of Jeje, Ami andDidun. They admired many of their simple life, good traditions and qualitiesand but tried hard to abolish the bad ones. Some of the most dedicated andselfless workers, who were sons and daughters to [illegible], spent their livesorganizing the Adivasis in their nonviolent fight against the British, otherexploiters, superstitions and similar ills of the society. Some of these havebeen documented in Gopinath

Mohanty's writings. With a view towards acomprehensive development programme, which was started by a few devotedGandhians, actions were initiated by my grandparents. The programme wasdisrupted by the killing of such workers by vested interests, the impositionof emergency etc. To revive it, Gaga initially started a residential schoolfor Adivasi girls. The aim was not to "modernize", as other organizationsare bent on doing, by destroying every good quality and value system thetribal society has an inheritance and heritage of, but to enrich the tribalsby adding qualities and modern developments the other civilizations has tooffer without destroying theirs. She spent a lot of time in Gopalwadi, aremote place on a hillock surrounded by forests and wild life. She workedday and night, alone planting thousands of trees, setting up the silk wormcentre, constructing the houses and teaching the children and building aschool for the villagers. Once, my wife Swapna and I accompanied her toGopalwadi. I wondered, looking at the very low platform at the Keutagudarailway station, how she is going to negotiate it. Climb up she did, from theground level to the railway compartment, alone by herself, at 87 years of age,by a technique that would be the envy of seasoned rock climbers. She wouldtravel in unreserved compartments. Neglect of her own health there andduring the relief work after the supercyclone made her seriously ill severaltimes. All through she would be reciting Gita, singing Bhajans and Tagorecompositions, and the patriotic songs of freedom movement. She would askmy wife Swapna to sing particular favourite songs and bhajans. She was veryhappy whenever Swapna found time to participate in social work.

There are very few born in this earth about whose work and life the moreyou learn and contemplate the more you admire and wonder. Universalexamples are Gandhiji, Einstein (his admirer), and Leonardo da Vinci.At least for me, Gaga belongs to this sublime category. Her friends rangedfrom Mahatma Gandhi to the little known wives of swineherds. She hassaved my life several times nursing me back to health, which is the duty ofany mother. But her call of duty was so strong that she has also saved innumerable lives in refugee camps, during riots and calamities, in hospitals andcottages, young babies, old ladies, young men and old men. She has workedamidst dreaded criminals and rebels in the ravines of Chambal, among theNaxalites in the height of their movement in Calcutta and Bengal, among therevolutionaries in Bengal, converting or convincing them of the superiority ofthe path of non-violence. She was an epitome of self-abnegation and identified herself, according to the philosophy of life (perhaps imbibed by Gandhijiand her father) to identify one with the lowliest. But she was equally at easein discussing the intricacies of Vedanta with the learned *Pandits* of Varanasiand demonstrating how to cut cabbages to the finest shreds to the finesthousewife-cooks of Bengal. She was admired by the great philosopher, theonly one to master both Indian and Western Philosophy, who happened alsoto be a cousin. She had never told anything that would hurt someone till thelast few months of her life when she was completely bedridden. Only duringthe last months of her life did she tell, perhaps with a definite intention,something that would hurt someone's feeling, and the persons whom she toldthat never took that as an affront and completely ignored her words andtook care of her as lovingly as nothing has been said by her. They alwayswondered whether it was intentional on her part so that they will start hating her and that it will result in their leaving her(she needed round the clocklooking after at that time) so that she leaves this world without giving much trouble to anyone. She had never uttered a harsh word to me.

The fundamental principle which guided her in the quest for the ultimatetruth was Ahimsa and she relentlessly pursued to achieve a just society. Herswas a totally dedicated life, never a moment of rest, full of joy, immeasurable sufferings, agony and ecstasy, and what she called Sublime AmbrosialExperiences, and to some a life and talents wasted in vain. She liked the Sukta

इयंविसृष्टिर्यत ।आबभूव यदि वा दधेयदि वा न ।
यो ।आस्याध्यक्ष: परम व्योमन्त्सो आंग वेद यिद वा न वेद ॥

"Whence all creation had its origin, he, whether he fashioned it or whetherhe did not, he, who surveys it all from highest heaven, he knows - or maybeeven he does not know".To the test,

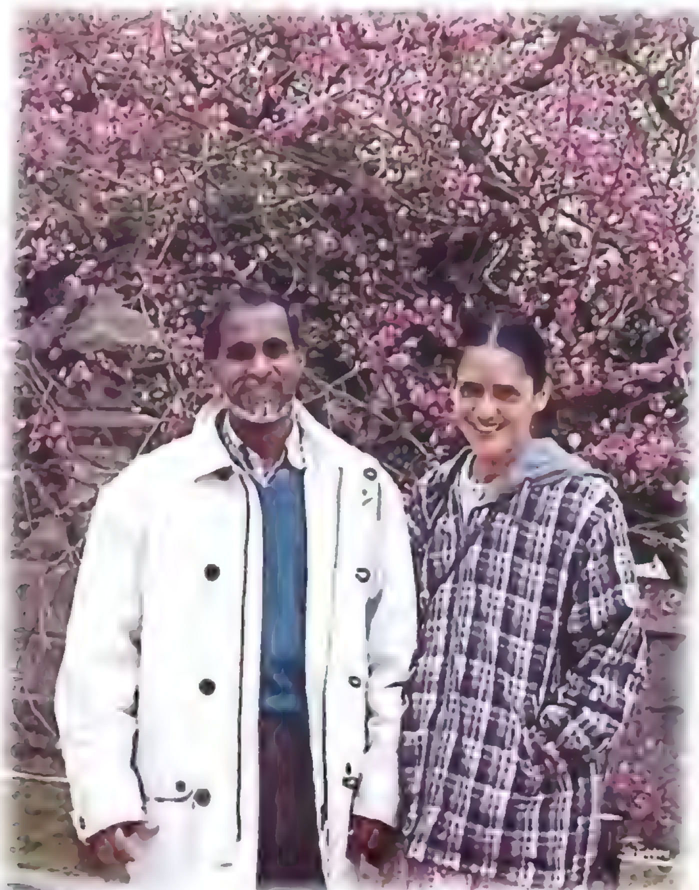
क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया।
दुर्गं पथस्तत्कवयो वदन्ति ॥

"for that path is sharp as a razors edge, impassable, and hard to go by,say the wise", she succeeded admirably.





[The brothers]



[Jnanadeva and Sumitra Maharana]




[Ansuman with Grand and Great-Grandmother]



[Sumitra and Jnanadeva Maharana]

THE UNTOLD STORY

Jnanadeva Maharana

This article is not a biographical account of my mother (Gaga). It is recollection of my childhood memories and, in the process; I attempt to provide certain facts which belong to the blackout period of her life. Wherever I have found gaps in my memory, I have tried to dramatize a little bit inspired by the author of the Alexander triology, Mary Renault. I had a wonderful childhood and I was very fortunate to have everything a child wants. What does a child want? Love and affections, care and total freedom. I received all that in abundance not only from my parents, relatives but also from everyone around me. As Gaga has confessed in her autobiography, she had poured everything she had on me and emptied herself. Gaga had entered public life at an early age. Her life and deeds can be broadly classified into four phases:(i) The Childhood, (ii) The formative years, (iii) Life as a wife as well as a mother and (iv) Total devotions to nonviolent revolution and social service. The first phase is rather well documented in her autobiography, in the autobiographies of her brother, Man Mohan Chaudhury (Mamu) and her mother, Rama Devi (Ami). Moreover, the celebrated author Gopinath Mohanty, in the biography of Gopabandhu Chaudhury (Jeje) 'Dhuli Matira Santha' has graphically portrayed the socio-economic scenario of Orissa. He has also painted very colorfully the life style of the upper crust of the society of that period. Jeje was married in another famous and aristocratic family. He was a brilliant student and took up the coveted position of Deputy Magistrate in the British India. Therefore, Gaga was groomed to become an accomplished lady befitting to her pedigree when she grew up. She learned vocal classical music (Khayal) and Sitar from a renowned Ustad Khanu Mian and acquired the skills with a lot of reyaz. Moreover, she learned whatever was expected of her to learn as she grew up. She has vividly described her childhood and the life style in the family and in the families of close relatives. The life would have continued to cruise in the 'auto-pilot' mode had not Jeje decided to relinquish his job in 1921 and joined the Non-cooperation Movement launched by Gandhiji. His younger brother, Nabakrushna Chaudhury (Dada-Jeje to us) discontinued his college education for the same purpose and soon went to Savarmati Ashram. Therefore, there was a sudden transition to another value system, another aspiration and another goal in the family. A drastic 'course correction' had to be contemplated. It took a while for Jeje to decide. It has been noted that he had realized that the attitude of the entire family must undergo changes and he had to work towards this purpose. The sudden demise of Utkalmani Gopabandhu Dash changed the scenario in political stage of Orissa and Jeje had to take major responsibilities pertaining to freedom struggle. One of the fundamental decisions in the family was not to send the children to the conventional schools and yet they were to be 'properly' educated. The home front had to accept the new way of life. Thus the first phase of the life of Gaga was not as smooth as it should have been. In fact, it must have been quite a bumpy ride for a child to change over from life style of haut couture to life style of a common man/woman. The baptisation to the second phase was her arrest and a very brief detention in 1930 when she was going thirteen. The Lavan Satyagraha had started. It was illegal to sell the salt which has been made by breaking the salt law. She has narrated to me her exchanges with the magistrate in very colorful way in my childhood up-teen times. She was in the Harijan Padayatra of Gandhiji in 1934. For a seventeen year old, it was 'love at first sight' when she came face to face with

Gandhiji. Jeje had decided to move to Bari in order to undertake the constructive Program of Gandhiji. Therefore, in August 1934, Jeje, Ami, Gaga along with a handful of dedicated Gandhian workers just arrived in Bari without any prior arrangements and ended up in the house of Baman Babu to start with. The details of all the activities at Bari have been very carefully documented. Bari was the beacon light of freedom movement in Orissa. Besides the aforementioned books, the autobiography of Binod Kanungo provides a graphic account of their works and life during this period. We may safely conclude that the foundations for Gandhian ways of life and the Gandhian philosophy were very firmly laid at Bari from 1934 to 1942. There is no need to elaborate her life and deeds during the second phase.

The third phase began in 1942 when she got married to Sarat Chandra Maharana (Bā). I have not heard any detail account of how this marriage was arranged. What I have heard and I trust is that Jeje was responsible for this 'match fixing'. My father was Government servant in the education department. He went to Wardha for a training in Basic Education in 1938. Gaga was the only girl from Orissa in that group. Gaga told me that she does not recall any interactions with Bā. She was already in the circles of freedom fighters and used to go to Sevagram during weekends. Bā, by nature, a person who keeps himself to his shell and was not a person who socialises, let alone socialise the beautiful daughter of Gopabandhu and Rama Devi Chaudhury. He joined the Basic Education center at Ramachandrapur in March 1939 and she was teaching in a Basic School in Aurangabad (Bari). When the Congress led Government of Orissa resigned in 1939 after the World War-II broke out, the next administration decided to close down the new education Program. Bā immediately resigned from the Government job, on February 24, 1941. He did not give any reason in his letter of resignation. He was a very meticulous person, very sincere to the cause and man of impeccable integrity. His command over both English and Oriya was astonishing. I have heard from Gaga that those days, when Jeje was member of Congress Working Committee, he used to give Bā drafts of his letters for suggestions and modifications. These letters were meant for leading politician of India who were Members of the CWC. I again cross checked with Gaga whether Bā really suggested modifications and corrections. Indeed, he did on the margins. Jeje must have assessed him over these years very carefully. Bā must have passed Jeje's crucible tests. Then he must have found him good enough for the hand of his only daughter. Those who know of Jeje and his nature they know it requires a lot of guts to suggest corrections on the margins of his draft letter and Bā used to do thatunhesitatingly.

The marriage was solemnized by Acharya Harihar Dash (Acharaya Mahashaya) onFebruary 25, 1942 at Sevaghar, Bari, without any celebrations. The couple movedto Ramachandrapur. However, before they settled down in their new life, Gandhijiannounced the launching of 'Quit India' Movement. His call was 'Do or Die'. Allthe prominent leaders were arrested very quickly. Therefore, there was no high levelleadership to carry on the movements. Those few prominent leaders who had escapedarrests went underground and communications to coordinate various actions weredifficult. Like many other parts of India, Bari was awaiting for arrival of this crucialmoment in the history of India. All such centers were following Gandhiji's adviceand executing his constructive programmes although some quarters used to ridiculetheir 'soft' approach. In the Bari region many people from ordinary walks of life hadregistered themselves as 'Maran Sena' (joined a brigade to sacrifice life for the causeof freedom) voluntarily.In this background, a group of freedom fighters 'liberated' Kaipada and declared itsindependence and

hoisted national flag in the premises of the post office of the village. This incident occurred in August 1942 and it took a while for the Governmentestablishment to act. They sent small armed police contingent to recapture Kaipada.The terrain between Binjharpur and Kaipada (approximately 5 miles) was submergedunder flood water. The platoon marched on the village, arrested some freedom fighters and headed back to their boat. It was morning of Rakhi Purnima, August 26,1942. Bā was to proceed to Kaipada; however, he had fever. Therefore, Gaga headedfor Kaipada around noon that day. There was a sprawling mango grove on the bankof Brahmani en route to Kaipada. While she was crossing the mango grove somepeople came running and told her that the police force is heading towards their boat,with the prisoners, which was moored on the outskirt of the village on the submergedpaddy fields. As she rushed through, gunshots were heard. She arrived at the sceneof the action shortly and found four persons were mortally wounded. Among themwas Mayadhar Bhuyan, Hatasahi, who was bayoneted on the right upper part of hisbody. Fresh blood was pouring out and filling up small ankle deep ditch. The otherthree martyrs were Sananda Swain, Saunti Malik and Hadibandhu Panda. SuprabhatDey, Anyasipur, was barely nine years old. He was clinging on to Gaga and the policehad bayoneted his arm. Gaga tore a portion of her Sari into pieces and bandagedthe wounded. Appārently, she lost her temper and used rather stern words on thepolice officer. The contingent led by Lakshman Misra left the scene without botheringabout the dead and the wounded. Gaga has narrated this incident so many timesin my childhood that I felt I was on the spot and visualize the entire terrain andthe incidents in my mind's eye. Her voice will almost break charged with emotions;however, I never recall tears rolling down. Later, as a school student, at Vanee Shree,we went to that location every year on Rakhi Purnima and we offered prayers andthe choir group of the school sang patriotic songs.Bā and Gaga were arrested on the 2nd September, 1942 and sent to Berhampur andCuttack jails,respectively as security prisoners without trials. She was released firstin 1944 and was rearrested for violating the prohibitory order by entering Jajpur Subdivision and imprisoned for a brief period. They both were released from the prisontowards end of 1944. They decided to have a family and I was born in October 1945.

I shall rely on my memory now on since there is very little recorded document accessible to me. I recall couple of scenes for the sake of amusements and as atestimony tomy childhood memory. I cross checked them with Gaga only a few years ago and shewas astonished that I could narrate them so vividly although these trivial episodeshave never been mentioned to me. The first scenery is that there is car standing ona road at an elevation and a man with half pants and a hat on is grinning at me.He takes me and we go to a nearby place walking and a huge bird with a rope tiedto his neck is brought by a man. This bird cannot fly. The person is Kalu Mamu,the location is Patamundai and the bird in question is 'Cherala'. This incident isdefinitely before February 1948. Since we went to Patamundai by boat it could beAugust or September. I was not yet two. Gaga was startled when I told her only afew years ago. The second scene I told her was of a narrow river. Boats are moored onthe bank. There are two closed doors on the river and a few metres downstream thereare two more closed doors. The place is Kendupatna and the river is actually a canaland the pair of two doors are due to the fact that there is a lock at Kendupatna. Thisnarration of event must be before September 1948 and I was not three yet. There areclear memories of other events which are irrelevant here. I barely remember aboutassassination of Gandhiji in January 1948.

The central point is, now I know, Bā had a nervous breakdown due to excess work,lack of rest and nutrition deficiency which led to it in February 1948. He could notraise his head from supine position. He was very weak and he became over sensitivetoany minor disturbance. He could not stay continuously in any place and wasmovedto Cuttack, Puri, Kendupatna...Gaga took extraordinary care of him. The Kaviraj,Brajanath Misra of Kendupatna, treated him and Bā recovered. There are sketchydescriptions of that period. He was advised rest and not to take any mental burden.We were back at Ramachandrapur. We stayed in a small hut at the Kasturba Center.Gaga had already joined the Kasturba Center as an instructor in 1946. I remember,Gaga waking up early in the morning and going away for a while. Once I followedher and I found Gaga was teaching Asan-Namaskar to the lady inmates. Sometimesduring 1946 to 1951, she might have acted as the 'Pratinidhi' at the Kasturba Center. When my younger brother (Bani) was on the way, we moved to another hut. Iremember that few inmates would come in the afternoon and would talk to her in analien language and had books with different alphabets (I did not learn alphabets tillI was six). Later, I realized that Gaga was giving Hindi lessons to them.I was delighted and quite jealous after my brother (Bani) arrived on January 26,1951. We moved to Remuna when Bani was a few months old and stayed there for awhile. One day, all of a sudden, we left Remuna and returned to Ramachandrapur.The reason for going to Remuna was that there was not enough means to sustainthe family at Ramachandrapur from the earnings of Bā. However, while Gaga wasat Remuna she was contacted to undertake translations with a small salary and weshifted back to Ramachandrapur. I was almost six and was aware of events in thesurroundings. Jeje and Mamu had taken up life of ordinary farmers and earning theirlivings by tilling lands in Nuaghara. This was the consequence of a meeting Gandhijihad convened in 1945 at Sevagram. Binod Kanungo was present there and he hassummarized the event very precisely. Let us recapitulate what Gandhiji had advisedin 1945. Binod Kanugo has noted in his autobiography (p 22) that Gandhiji convened a meeting of Gandhians who were devoted to his philosophy and constructiveProgram. He called it 'Samagra Seva '. He opened with remark that he foreseesIndia gaining independence and it will come much sooner than expected. He alsoemphasizes it will not be the independent India he has conceived of. Therefore, hechose one hundred Gandhians, from various parts of India. He advised each workerto settle down in a village, lead life of a common villager, earn his bread from thesweat of his brows. Such a person will also pursue ideals of Samagra Seva and live anexemplary life reflecting Gandhian ways so that the surrounding population will beinfluenced and inspired by his deeds and ways of life. That was the life adopted byJeje and Mamu before they joined the Bhoodan Movement.However, life for many Gandhians took an unexpected turn when Vinobaji launchedthe Bhoodan Movement. A large section of Gandhians were lightning struck whenGandhiji was assassinated. This bunch had declined to join electoral races and believed in the decentralisation of power and in village based industrial progress. However, it was quite evident that policy of the Government was heading in a differentdirection. Although they felt rudderless momentarily when Gandhiji disappearedphysically from the scene, their confidence did not waver. When they were regrouping and were also groping for directions, they found Vinobaji's movement to be thecorrect path to fulfill the dreams of Gandhiji. Thus Jeje, Mamu and Bā were drawnnaturally to Vinobaji's philosophy and by 1952 they were very much deeply intoBhoodan Movement. I attended Sarvodaya Sammelan at Chandil and Gaya in 1953and 1954 respectively. Although I barely understood a sentence, I sat through theseopen sessions for prolonged periods. Obviously

something was happening.An immediate consequence of all these was that we were left behind at Ramachandrapur and Bā joined Bhoodan Yajna Samiti in January, 1952. With this new roleBā was either touring Orissa on foot, on cycle, on boat or he was looking after organisational aspects at Cuttack. Only once in a while he will show up for a few days.

Let me narrate what was daily routine of Gaga at home. She will get up early in themorning, complete the usual household chores and send me off to the school (only afew hundred meters away in the same campus). After taking care of Bani, she willgo to the backyard on the bank of Brahmani. She will work like a woman laboredfor solid two to three hours, like tending the cotton plants, banana plantations andsome fruit trees. She will grow vegetable for our consumptions. Then she would come back and cook very simple vegetarian meals. She insisted and saw to it that we arenot deprived of our daily milk diet. In the afternoon she will routinely spin on herCharkha. The threads were exceptionally fine and uniform in tension and thickness.She will sit down on the floor with a low desk and start writing something on longnarrow pieces of paper, occasionally consulting dictionaries. One week's work willaccumulate to a bundle of paper and I shall go and post it to Cuttack. There willalways be time to teach Hindi to ladies from Kasturba Center every day. Therefore,she was also single handedly spreading the Rashtrabhasha, Hindi. This regulated lifewent on day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year.I reminded her of my childhood couple of decades ago and brought up some pointsto touch her most sensitive inner chords. She was very irritated and upset that I remembered all gory details and I had observed and understood very comprehensively.This aspect is not in the meticulous diary of Bā. I have no access to her diarieseither. When she realized that I knew very well her hardships and even sometimesmiserable financial conditions she surrendered and very slowly revealed to me. I callit the blackout period. Let us recapitulate what Gandhiji had advised in 1945. Everyone would perform hard labor to earn the living and follow the Gandhian Program.She was precisely practicing that.I assert that Gaga plunged into a very deep Sadhana. She played role of a wife, amother and practiced what Gandhiji had ordained in 1945 so silently that hardly anyone noticed it. She was doing hard manual labor, spinning daily and was indulgedin other constructive works. We lived like people at very low economic stratum. Shewas earning ₹60/-(sixty rupees) a month as wage for her translations to maintain afamily of three since Bā was not paid for maintaining his family. I was old enough torecognize that she was leading a very frugal life and on many evenings her dinner wasboiled black-gram or horse-gram (although edible, usually meant as cattle feed). Sheembraced this way of life with so much of grace and dignity that no one ever noticedwhat she was going through on the financial front. She never parted with her joy andsense of humor and her mind was tranquil and calm. Otherwise, she would not havechurned out those marvelous translations. I was quite aware of the crunch and Bā hasmentioned this in his published and edited version of his diary (about me see p182,vol 3, date 05.06.1958). Even when we visited very wealthy and aristocrat relatives inCuttack, I learned to behave in a dignified manner just like Bā and Gaga. Thus thedire economic poverty never affected me nor I hated the poor and poverty. This iswhat the Greek philosopher and writer, Alexandros Papadiamantis, calls honourablepoverty which he himself had opted in his life. There were moments in her life thatshe had lost this source of income. There have been two such occasions. One suchepisode is mentioned in Bā's diary (see p42, vol 3, entry 24.7.1956). To her verydesperate letter in 1956, in reply Bā wrote to wait and have patience; just like theCount of Monte Cristo says 'Hope and Wait; Wait

and Hope'. The second entry(see p247, vol3, entry 29.01.1959) is more explicit narration regarding the event of 1959.She declined to accept any assistance from her parents family. Moreover, her father's brother, Nabakrushna Chaudhury, was the Chief Minister of Orissa when the firstcrisis loomed in 1956. She just carried on her struggle. She used to write a line eachday on my 'hand writing note book' to practice and improve my Oriya hand writings.

One line says' Just like pure gold glitters when subjected to high temperature in fire;the same way a pure person shines when put to materialistic hardships and harsh life'.Of course, I did not make out the deep meaning of this one or other such couplets atthat juncture.Since there is no systematic records of her daily life and all what she was indulged in,it will remain largely unknown. I have felt very strongly that when a person pursueshis/her ideals with single minded dedication he/she has to do it alone. In some sensethe person is competing against himself in order to perfect his skills and his mentalstrength while holding on to the ideals and goal. We have seen this in Bobby Fischer.All the time Fischer was playing against Fischer and as he says Fischer always won.John McEnroe competing against John McEnroe and more recently Roger Federeragainst Roger Federer. I am sure Gandhiji was testing against himself too in orderto achieve the bench mark he set for himself. She continued to perfect her languageskill, her study of the philosophy of Gandhi and Vinoba and endeavoured, as muchas possible, to put all these into practice. At the same time she was earning a living,raising two children and participating in Gandhian Program. She even took timeoff, leaving two of us behind, to join Bhoodan Padayatra in Keonjhar and elsewhere.This life style continued till about 1962 when I passed HSCE. Jeje passed away in1958 and she often took time off to look after Ami.She had tremendous control over her senses and would very rarely display her emotions and will never lose her mental equilibrium. In winter of 1957, when she waswith Jeje at Bari, Bani was barely six years old and he had gone near a pond in themorning. Suddenly, he came howling that 'I have been bitten by a snake. I have seenit and it has bitten me twice.' Indeed, there were marks just below his ankle and hewas bleeding a bit. Instead of fainting or howling herself, Gaga tied two tight knotswith a rope on his thigh. She took a razor blade, cut the wound open. She tookhim to a hand tube well and asked me to pump water continuously on the bleedingwound. In fact two fangs were extracted, Bani bled profusely from the wound fora while. Needless to say the nearest health facility was more than two miles awayand the health officer was an LMP Doctor. Moreover, there was no medicine to treatfor snake bite in that center. In order to test whether it was a poisonous snake ornot, they gave Bani bitter Neem leaves and he kept eating them merrily and onlyafter quite a while he complained that they started tasting bitter. There are otherinstances where she did not lose her cool under very trying conditions. Therefore,she had not only mastered the scriptures but also practiced their contents to a verylarge extent.

The fourth phase of her life started once she returned to remain with Ami and to lookafter her. Gaga followed Ami like a shadow and was her personal secretary, counselorand a coworker. All her activities have been noted very well then onwards. We may ask: was Gaga picture perfect and infallible? Of course, I get that kindof feeling specially from the speeches and writings I read after she passed away. Ialso noticed that she was sharing some of her feeling, thoughts and dilemmas withme for last 10-15 years and seek my views on matters which she would not normallydiscuss with me earlier. Although I did not hurt her sentiments which I earlier usedto, I analyzed the changes in her. I had not grown in statures in accordance with theparameters which she had set

for herself in life. However, I thought she was feelingin-secured. She has committed two blunders in her life as far as I know. When I confronted her squarely for the first one, she admitted that circumstances had tied herhand to compromise. The second one was due to her old age and slowing down of herabilities to thoroughly analyze the entire scenario and consequences before taking thedecision. This is not very unusual for human beings when system slows down and allof us are heading towards this irreversible end. Even great grand masters make sillymoves. In fact Rahul Dravid will not get bowled by a ball that got through his batand pad when he was at the zenith of his career. Nor Federer will miss an overheadsmash at his peak as he does now. In the late stage, she went through turmoil andrealized that her name sells but not everyone around her subscribes to the ideals andvalues she cherished all her life. Nevertheless she never lost her spirits nor was she ever depressed.

I am aware that there are contemplations to set up memorials for her. This wouldnot have been acceptable to her. As a matter of principle Jeje, Ami and Mamu haverejected this very idea of building monuments, memorials, erecting statues and havinga tomb stone in their memories. Those who have erected statues ormonuments intheir memories have not followed their deeds and have not understood iota of whatthey lived for! I have heard that there are attempts to write biography of AnnapurnaMaharana. It is a formidable task. Although I have no literary talent, in my benchmark three biographies stand out for the vast researches leading to factual contentsand the masterly display of literary acumen. Moreover, both the authors have amplyconveyed how much emotional bonds and respect they had on whom the biographieswere written. First is the two volume epic 'Satabdira Surya' and 'Kula Bruddha' bySurendra Mohanty and the second one is 'Dhuli Matira Santha' by Gopinath Mohanty. The third one is biography of Malati Choudhury, 'Bahniman', by PrafullaDas. May be Prafulla Babu does not rank as a lierary giant compared to the othertwo. However, he has the added advantage of being by the side of Malati Choudhuryand has potrayed her very lucidly with many important historical facts. AlthoughRama Devi passed away in 1985 there is no biography of hers at par with the threementioned above. Binod Kanugo had aptly mention (in 1983) about (almost) impossibility of writing one for Rama Devi. He wrote: *Her greatness, her generosityand her noble character are known only to a handful of persons (written in 1983 andall are gone by now - 2013). Those surviving were her comrades in arms. I havebeen waiting for a biography on her by someone who was inspired to join freedommovement, who knew about the sacrifices and fundamental values of her life. Alasno such biography is published till 1983. Her own autobiography cannot depict hergreatness, her compassion and the profound influence she had left behind on manysouls. Therefore, a person who has never immersed in the life-long activities of hers,who has not embraced her value system, no matter how great and famous literary personality he might be, he will never portray the life of Rama Devi.* Even till today hiswords remain prophetic! I do not see around who can write the biography of Gaga.

As far as the autobiography goes, Binod Mamu's conclusions stand word by word forGaga as well.Gaga had one attribute which never deserted her till almost the very end. She hada tremendous sense of humor and laugh out the whole life. In 2008, she was fightingfor her life and it was on knife's edge.She was coming round slowly. I wanted to testwhether she was already her own self or not. I went to her bed side and told her thefollowing. *Look I have been a total disappointment, failure and disaster for you. Youwent to Sevagram when you were carrying me and Gandhi touched your forehead.When I was barely a year old, every morning you will recite one*

Chapter of BhagvatGeeta with your melodious voice. This did not cut any ice. Then you took me to somany Sarvodaya Sammelans and to the proximity of Vinobaji. These efforts did notbear any fruit. You took me to to Shri Arabindo Ashram and I had a chocolate fromthe hand of Shree Maa herself. It did not turn me on as a spiritual person. And Ireeled off another half a dozen of her sincere endeavours to make some of her dreamsa reality in my own life. I told her that all your sincere efforts failed. You are a verydisappointed mother as far as your son is concerned. She had that very soft smile on her face. She replied to me in a very low and sweetvoice of hers *Photke did not choose to become a farmer nor opted to be a boatman.Photke became a snake charmer. Now you catch and charm snakes!*



CURRICULUM VITAE

Name:	Annapoorna MAHARANA (né Choudhury)
Date of Birth:	November 3, 1917
Nationality:	Indian
Father:	Late Gopabandhu Choudhury
Mother:	Late Rama Devi Choudhury
Husband:	Late Sarat Chandra Maharana

Awards and Recognitions:

1. D. Litt (HC), Utkal University.
2. Sarala Puraskar (Prize), Literary Award in Oriya Literature, for Autobiography, *Amruta Anubhabha.*
3. Felicitation by the President of India for her participation in IndependenceMovement (60 years of Quit India Movement).
4. Utkala Ratna (Jewel of Orissa), Utkal Sahitya Samaj.
5. International Rotary Award, for her life time social services.
6. Diwali Ben Charitable Trust, Mumbai, for life time social service.
7. Radhanath Rath Foundation Award, for life time achievement.
8. Dinabandhu Sahu Foundation Award, for social service.
9. Ravenshaw College Felicitation and Award.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF ANNAPOORNA MAHARANA

Annapoorna Maharana (né Choudhury), born on 3rdNovember 1917 was the secondchild of Shri Gopabandhu Choudhury and Smt Rama Devi. The Choudhury familywas famous for their aristocracy, wealth and her grandfather, Gokulananda Choudhury, was a famous lawyer and politically powerful person. Annapoorna's mothercame from the most renowned family of Orissa. Rama Devi was second daughter ofGopalballav Das and niece of the legendary Utkal Gaurab Madhusudhan Das, the architect of modern Orissa. Gopabandhu was an outstanding student. Barely within afew months of Gopabandhu's marriage Rama lost her father and very soon he lost hisfather too. Subsequently, he joined the civil service of the 'Empire' looking forward toa very successful and prosperous career ahead as used to be the ambitions of the elitefamilies of the society in that era. However, Gopabandhu could not go against his ownconscience and decided to resign from the Government service; already his youngerbrother Nabakrushna had given up his college career following the calls of MahatmaGandhi to join the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921. Nabakrushna went on tobecome a leader of Congress, founding member of Congress socialist Party, ChiefMinister of Orissa and eventually dedicating his life to Sarvodaya movement.

Annapoorna, who was to be brought as a girl of aristocratic affluent family of Orissa,had to be molded differently as per the decisions of Gopabandhu to quit his jobabruptly. He decided to change the attitude and life style of his own family beforeplunging into freedom movement.The first step was to adopt the Gandhian way of life and practice what you preach.The son,

Manmohan and daughter, Annapoorna were not sent to any school for education and their education for future was charted out by Gopabandhu. The twochildren learnt at home what every child learns at school. However, the real education was to prepare them mentally and physically to face the hard struggle that wasawaiting them.

The Choudhury family underwent a cultural and social transformation when Nabakrushna married Malati (Sen) whom she met at Santi Niketan. Malati came from a very eliteBramho aristocratic family and had grown up at Santiniketan and was a favouritepupil of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. She was an excellent player of Beena, wasexponent of Rabindra Sangeet and trained as a dancer by Gurudev.Manmohan and Annapoorna could explore new horizons in culture, art and music. Annapoorna already had a good training of Sitar and vocal music under UstadKhanu Mian and now she adapted to Rabindra Sangeet. Thus the children of Choudhury's were brought up in the confluence of Tagore's cultural heritage and Gandhiji'sspiritual and moral values. The brother and sister have amply demonstrated theircommitments to Gandhian way of life through their deeds and their aesthetic sensesand contributions to creative writings.

When they moved to Alaka Ashram near Jagatsinghpur she disciplined herself toAshram way of life, spinning with Charkha, participating in social work and assisting freedom fighter in their revolutionary works. She memorized the entire BhagvatGeeta at the age of twelve and she had very enchanting voice.She participated in picketing when the movement, persuading customers to boycottliquors and foreign goods. Scores of young boys deserted schools to participate inthe movement and they were called 'Banara Sena'. It is during the salt Satyagrahathat Annapoorna tasted the prison life of the British India when she was detainedfor illegally selling salt made from the Bay of Bengal, although this hospitality wasvery short lived.She participated in the Historic Harijan Pada Yatra of Gandhiji when Bapu marchedfrom Puri to Bhadrak. Gopabandhu, Rama Devi, Manmohan, Annapoorna and anumber of freedom fighters accompanied Gandhiji during this march. It not just afoot march; it was a message to be spread among the masses for social reform, forhygiene and to prepare themselves for the forthcoming freedom movement. Gandhijiadvised that all his followers should spread out in the country to serve the villagesand undertake constructive works such as Khadi, village sanitation, social reforms like removing untouchability and so on. An amusinganecdote about meeting of MahatmaGandhi with mother of Gopabandhu Choudhury, Padmavati, is worth mentioning:Gandhiji used to collect cash and jeweleries as domination for his movement and in1934 he asked for some donations from Padmavati. The witty grand old lady repliedin Oriya " I have donated my two sons, two daughter-in-laws and two grandchildren to you already, what more is left with me to be donated to you?". Needless to saythat during 1930-34 movements entire Choudhury family had been imprisoned onetime or another.

Gopabandhu, Rama Devi and Annapoorna, in 1934 together with several freedomfighters, lady volunteers and young girls decided to set up the Seva Ghar Ashram at Bari in the undivided Cuttack district. Manmohan came to Bari subsequently.Bari is tormented by devastating flood every year by the three rivers, Kharashrota,Bramhani and Birupa. Gopabandhu visited Bari when he was a second officer (postedat Jajpur) during one of those menacing floods and then refused to write a toned downreport of the calamity when his superior pressurized him. Subsequently, he resignedfrom his service.

Now they started a new phase of their life, living under very trying conditions andtheir life style was at the same level as the lowest economic strata of people in Bari.Their dedicated work was not accepted in every sphere of the society since untouchability and other social evils were pervading. The villagers of Bari and surroundingareas began to understand the ideology behind all the constructive works and theessence of the Gandhian philosophy. Subsequently, Seva Ghar became a hub for thefreedom movement and Gandhiji's constructive programmes.Annapoorna was very active in many fronts. She took part in visiting Harijan localities and educating them, worked among the women and took part in Basic Education.She came in personal contact with Gandhiji and subsequently, she accompanied herfather on many occasions to Sevagram, Wardha, to meet Gandhiji. She spent fourand half months at Wardha as a teacher trainee in the programme for Basic National Education in 1938 under the All India Hindustani Talimi Sangh. She was in charge ofa school near Bari after she returned from Wardha. The five years she spent at Bari,from 1934, had its effect since a large number of freedom fighters, men and womenjoined the Independence struggle in subsequent years. She went and lived in VeeraNarasinghapur, in Puri district, under the influence of Acharya Harihar Dash for 18months from 1939 where her focus was on constructive work and social reform.Annapoorna Choudhury and Sarat Chandra Maharana were married in February1942 at Bari. The marriage was solemnized by Acharya Harihar Dash. It was anunique event by the social standard of that era. Annapporna came from the background mentioned earlier. Sarat Chandra was the youngest son of famous literarygiant Chandra Mohan Maharana. They belonged to different castes. Sarat Chandra was a brilliant educationist who started his career in the Education Departmentand had come to Ramachandrapur, near Bari, when Basic Education was initiatedthere. He also went to Wardha for the training in Basic Education. He resigned hisGovernment job when the Government decided to close down the education system.The wedding was very solemn and simple. The bride and groom walked from Bari toRamachandrapur after the ceremony was over.They started their new life together at Ramachandrapur. However, Gandhiji hadalready started thinking of the next and final step of the freedom movement. TheCongress workers had already sensed that the future was holding some exciting actionsout there. All the important leaders were arrested after Gandhiji gave the clarion call**Do or Die** in August 1942. Every Congress worker took his own decision since theapex leadership was behind the prison. Annapoorna organised 'Shanti Sena' and 'Maran Sena' in that region. So was thespirit and mood of the mass that they declared themselves independent which wasthe case in many part of the country. In the village Kaipada, about 6km from Ramachandrapur, the freedom fighters took siege of the post office, burnt some papers,hoisted the tricolour and declared the independence. A platoon of armed police was sent from Jajpur under the command of an officer to 'regain' the lost territory. Onarrival, they searched some houses and arrested a few people and decided to returnto Jajpur with the captured prisoners. Next day, August 26, 1942, was the 'RakhiPurnima' which turned out to be the day for playing Holi with blood.

When news reached Ramachandrapur that the police has arrested some of these people at Kaipada, some of the members of 'Sena' went in the direction of Kaipada.Annapoorna went towards Kaipada accompanied by one person and a young lad.However, she was told on the way that Police was already going back to Jajpur withthe prisoners and will board the boat which was moored near Kalamatia. Annapoornabriskly walked towards the water logged paddy field and

saw a crowd and later heardgun shots. On approaching the scene of violence she found one person was lying on apool of blood oozing from his chest. She tore apart her Sari and tried to bandage thewound but Mayadhar Bhuyan passed away very soon. This was display of supremecourage, as a woman alone faced armed forces that had already killed four unarmedpersons without any provocations and has boycotted many.What followed the aftermath of Kalamatia firing was tyranny. Government sentarmed forces, imposed punitive taxes and arrested people arbitrarily. Both Annapoorna and Sarat Chandra protested against this action. They were both arrested. Annapoorna was detained as a security prisoner (without trial) at Cuttackjail for two years from September 2, 1942 and he was sent to Berhampur jail. Annapoorna was detained for two years. When she was released in 1944, she was againconvicted and sentenced for 4 months prison term for violating the externment order. Finally the 'couple' were united after being separated for almost two and halfyears. Annapoorna went to spend a few months in Seva Gram with Gandhiji.Ganghiji had foreseen that India will win independence when the Second World Warcomes to an end. He was asking whether India was ready for the forthcoming freedom.He sent a message to all his followers to go back to villages. He advised that eachone should choose a village and adopt a way of life according to Gandhian principles and earn his living with his own labour. The life style should set an example to thecommon man to follow Gandhian ways. Thus, a large number of his followers, who decided not participate in elections and hold elected office, spread out to these villages.

Gopabandhu, Rama Devi, Manmohan and his wife Sumitra chose to return to Bari;whereas Annapoorna and Sarat Chandra decided to live in Ramachandrapur. He putall his efforts to reorganize the Basic Education and she was involved in the trainingprogrammes of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust. The KGNM Trust wasset up after Kasturba passed away in the Aga Khan Palace when she was imprisonedalong with Gandhiji and Mahadev Desai at the onset of 'Quit India' movement. Theprincipal goal of the Trust was to serve Women and Children. In order to achieve thisobjective a large number of women volunteers were required and they needed suitabletraining. In those days it was not easy for a woman to take part in social work.Moreover, widows were harassed and tormented in the society. The Trust undertookthe monumental task of social service and reforms especially focused on women andchildren. Every year scores of women, some very young widows, joined the trainingprogramme. A large number of the worker of the Trust dedicated rest of their livesfollowing the ideals of Gandhiji and Kasturba and went to serve in Adivasi areas ofOrissa. Annapoorna has played a very important role in organizing activities of theTrust ever since the activities started in Orissa. She was a Trustee of the KGNMTrust since 1986-2010.

Both Sarat Chandra and Annapoorna adhered to the principles of Gandhiji. WhenVinobaji launched Bhoodan Movement, Sarat Chandra took the responsibility of organizing the activities in Orissa as the Secretary. Annapoorna was left behind atRamachandrapur with two sons. She also became bread earning member to raise thefamily since her husband had joined the movement which paid only adequate amountfor his maintenance. She undertook translations of Vinobaji's writing, speeches fromHindi to Oriya which were published in periodicals. She led a very austier life duringthese years. Moreover, the couple had decided to educate their children according tothe tenets of Basic Education and they were sent to the school at Ramachandrapur.However, she would undertake Bhoodan Pada Yatra from time to time leaving

thetwo children under the care of her sister-in-law, Sumitra Choudhury.Generally, this phase of her life has not been highlighted by biographers. It was aperiod when she raised two children leading a modest life style by choice and yetcontributing a lot to nonviolent peaceful revolution which was aimed at fundamentalchanges in social structure and inculcate spiritual values.

She was invited to teach at the Shanti Sena Vidyalaya in Varanasi where Sarva SevaSangh had set up a training center to educate young people on the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence and to resolve social problems and disturbances through nonviolentmeans. Therefore, these Shanti Sainiks would risk their lives if communal riots brokeout and make every efforts to save lives of innocent women and children. Moreover,they will undertake missions to restore about peace and harmony. There have beennumerous examples where Shanti Sainiks have risked their lives. Annapoorna herselftook a leading role in restoration of peace when a communal riot had broken outin Rourkela, Orissa, in 1964. Moreover, she undertook Pada Yatra in the Chambalvalley along with other Sarvodaya worker in the dacoit infested areas spreading thewords of Gandhiji and Vonobaji. As is well known several of the gangs of Chambalvalley surrendered to Vinobaji and to Jayaprakash Narayan and renounced the pathof violence.

When the children grew up and were capable of taking care of themselves, Annapoornaindulged in the Gramdan and Sarvodaya movements more vigorously. She undertookPada Yatra in Adivasi areas of Orissa and went to other states to join Vinobaji.Kalahandi district of Orissa was very severely affected by drought in 1966 when anumber of people died due to starvation. She was involved in relief and rehabilitation works which was undertaken by Sarvodaya Relief Committee and KGNM Trust.Several young girls were orphaned and the Center of KGNM Trust at Satyabhamapur(birth place of Madhusudan Das) took care of them. These girls were educated, given vocational training and later lived a dignified life in the society.Annapoorna was accompanying her aged mother Rama Devi like a shadow wherevershe went on whatever missions. One of the most trying time came when signs ofinstability became manifest in Pakistan due to the turn of the events. People of EastPakistan (now Bangladesh) initiated struggles for their independence. A very largenumber of refugees fled to India and it became a burden for India on its boarderstates. Not only these refugees are to be provided food and shelter but the largenumber of people suffering from malnutrition and diseases are to be cared for. Rama Devi and Annapoorna proceeded to West Dinajpur district, West Bangal, accompanied by Sarat Chandra and several volunteers of Sarvodaya Relief Committeeand KGNM Trust. Their dedicated service and hard works earned tem the love andaffections of not only the refugees but also the local inhabitants. No sooner Bangladesh war was over than a devastating cyclone struck coastal districts of Orissa. Itcreated havoc killing thousands, leaving hundreds of villages marooned with no placefor habitations. The same group of people who were in West Dinajpur moved swiftlyto undertake responsibilities for cremation of the dead, treatments of the villagersand rehabilitation. Funds poured in from all over India for relief work and for reconstruction of houses for those who had no means to build one. The entire groupworked relentlessly.

One of the salient features Annapoorna's character has been to adhere to certainbasic principles in life. She is willing to take all risks, even to stake life, to confrontinjustice, to struggle for freedom and to stand by the side of the oppressed. It isamply demonstrated in her activities, be it

in a riot infested town or for the poorAdivasis in tribal belts of Orissa. She has devoted a lot of her time for constructiveworks in Kalahandi, Koraput, Raygada and elsewhere. She was very deeply involvedin a Khadi programme in Kalahandi which enables Adivasis to become self-sufficientand earn their livings.

She was instrumental in setting up a school for Adivasi children near Rayagada where the boys and girls undergo education as well as some vocational training in order tobecome self-sufficient. This school has made a tremendous impact in the sense thatotherwise deprived; girls have received good education contributing a lot to socialupliftment and social reforms. This school has been recognized by many as a modelinstitution.

Annapoorna has enriched Oriya literature considerably. She has translated severalbooks of Gandhiji, Vinobaji, Naraharibhai Parikh from Hindi to Oriya thus makingGandhian philosophy and literature accessible to a large section of Oriyas. Moreover,her writing pertaining to nonviolence, freedom movements, Sarvodaya philosophyhave appeared in Oriya periodicals and magazines.The autobiography of Annapoorna ***Amruta Anubhava*** is written in a lucid stylegiving a panoramic view of the hierarchies in the society those days. She has a vividpicture of the movement and narrated of the important events which she witnessedfrom very close quarters. Furthermore, the books serve as a tribute to a large number of freedom fighters who contributed to the struggle and sacrificed their lives andcareer for the independence of India. This book has been awarded one of the mostprestigious prizes of Oriya literature: The Sarala Puraskar.

The edifice of her life is built on four fundamental principles Ahimsa, Satya, Prem and Karuna. She continued to be activein many ways in spite of her frail health and was widely loved and respected. Shebreathed her last on December 31, 2012.





